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ESSAYS

ON

THE FORMATION AND PUBLICATION

OF

OPINIONS,

AND

ON OTHER SUBJECTS.

59552

The Third Edition, Revised and Enlarged.

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PREFACE

TO

THE FIRST EDITION.

It has been frequently objected to metaphysical speculations, that they subserve no useful purpose; and it must be allowed, that there are many inquiries in this department of intellectual exertion, which lead, in appearance, and even in reality, to no practical result. This is however a defect inherent in every pursuit, and can be brought as no specific objection against the philosophy of mind. How many substances are analyzed by the chemist, which can never be rendered useful; how many plants are minutely described by the naturalist, which might have

remained in obscurity without the least possible detriment to the world; and how many events are narrated by the historian, from which no beneficial inference can be drawn! It seems to be a necessary condition of human science, that we should learn many useless things, in order to become acquainted with those which are of service; and as it is impossible, antecedently to experience, to know the value of our acquisitions, the only way in which mankind can secure all the advantages of knowledge is to prosecute their inquiries in every possible direction. There can be no greater impediment to the progress of science than a perpetual and anxious reference at every step to palpable utility. Assured that the general result will be beneficial, it is not wise to be too solicitous as to the immediate value of every individual effort. Besides, there is a certain completeness to be attained in every science, for

which we are obliged to acquire many particulars not otherwise of any worth. Nor is it to be forgotten, that trivial and apparently useless acquisitions are often the necessary preparatives to important discoveries. The labours of the antiquary, the verbal critic, the collator of mouldering manuscripts, the describer of microscopic objects (labours which may appear to many out of all proportion to the value of the result), may be preparing the way for the achievements of some splendid genius, who may combine their minute details into a magnificent system, or evolve from a multitude of particulars, collected with painful toil, some general principle destined to illuminate the career of future ages. To no one perhaps are the labours of his predecessors, even when they are apparently trifling or unsuccessful, of more service than to the metaphysician; and he who is well acquainted with the science can scarcely fail

to perceive, that many of its inquiries are gradually converging to important results. Unallied as they may appear to present utility, it is not hazarding much to assert, that the world must hereafter be indebted to them for the extirpation of many mischievous errors, and the correction of a great part of those loose and illogical opinions by which society is now pervaded.

The principal Essays in the following work are attempts to throw the light of metaphysical investigation on subjects intimately connected with the affairs and happiness of mankind. The importance of the topics discussed in the two Essays to which the volume owes its title will be acknowledged by all, and it will be perceived by the attentive inquirer, that the principles which the author has there attempted to establish lead to the most momentous conclusions, many of which he has contented himself

with leaving to the sagacity of his readers. If any one will take the trouble of rigidly pursuing the main principle of the first Essay to all its consequences, he will find them of a magnitude and importance of which he was originally perhaps little aware.

In venturing upon these remarks, the author would not be conceived as making any undue claims to originality. Most of the principles, which he has advanced, have been repeatedly asserted, and have had an influence on mankind of which they themselves were probably unconscious. It often happens, that an important principle is vaguely apprehended, and incidentally expressed, long before it is reduced to a definite form, or fixed by regular proof: but while it floats in this state on the surface of men's understandings it is only of casual and limited utility; it is sometimes forgotten and sometimes abandoned, seldom pursued to its

consequences, and frequently denied in its modifications. It is only after it has been clearly established by an indisputable process of reasoning, explored in its bearings, and exhibited in all its force, that it becomes of uniform and essential service; it is only then that it can be decisively appealed to both in controversy and in practice, and that it exerts the whole extent of its influence on private manners and public institutions.

February, 1821.

PREFACE

TO

THE SECOND EDITION.

A NEW Edition of the following work being [illegible]d for, the author has only to state, for [illegible]isfaction of his readers, that the text of the present impression differs from that of the last in nothing but a few verbal alterations. The additions, which he has deemed it expedient to make, he has thrown into the form of an appendix of Notes and Illustrations, in which he has attempted to extend, support, and elucidate some of the doctrines contained in the Essays.

April, 1826.

PREFACE

TO

THE THIRD EDITION.

THE present Edition is issued to the public at a reduced price, with a view to secure for the work a more extensive circulation and a wider influence.

May, 1837.

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ESSAY

ON THE

FORMATION OF OPINIONS.

ESSAY I.

ON

THE FORMATION OF OPINIONS.

SECTION I.

ON THE TERMS BELIEF, ASSENT, AND OPINION.

EVERY proposition presented to the mind, the terms of which are understood, necessarily occasions either belief, doubt, or disbelief. These are states or affections of the mind on which definition can throw no light, but which no one can be at a loss to understand; resembling, in this respect, all the other simple operations and emotions of which we are conscious. Although we cannot define or illustrate them, we may, nevertheless, enlarge or limit the application of the terms by which they are distinguished.

By some writers the term belief has been restricted to the state of the understanding in relation to propositions of a probable nature. Locke, for instance, makes a distinction between the perception of truth in propositions which are certain, and the entertainment, as he expresses it, given by the mind to those which are only probable; styling the former knowledge, the latter belief, assent, or opinion.* This distinction, however, is not sanctioned by the practice of the generality of metaphysicians, who constantly employ the term belief in reference to facts and propositions of all kinds. They speak of the belief, not only of our own identity, of the existence of an exter-

* "Probability is likeness to be true, the very notation of the word signifying such a proposition, for which there be arguments or proofs, to make it pass or be received for true. The entertainment the mind gives this sort of propositions is called belief, assent, or opinion, which is the admitting or receiving any proposition for true, upon arguments, or proofs, that are found to persuade us to receive it as true, without certain knowledge that it is so."—*Essay on the Understanding*, book iv, chapter 15.

nal world, and of the being of a God, but of the axioms and theorems of geometry. Nor does there appear to be any ground for the distinction when we appeal to our own consciousness. The nature of the affection is the same, whatever be the nature of the subject which has occasioned it. It is a state, indeed, which admits of various modifications; or, in other words, the belief of some things may be more firm and lively than of others. This strength and liveliness, however, do not at all depend on the logical nature of the propositions entertained. We believe as firmly, that there was a sanguinary contest between the English and French on the field of Waterloo, as that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles, although the one would be ranked by logicians amongst probable, and the other amongst certain propositions.

There are two other terms sometimes employed as synonymous with belief *viz.* assent and opinion, but all the three have their respective shades of meaning. Assent ap-

pears to denote the state of the understanding in relation only to propositions; while belief has a more comprehensive acceptation, expressing the state of the mind in relation to any fact or circumstance, although that fact or circumstance may never have occurred to it in the form of a proposition, or, what is the same thing, may never have been reduced by it into words. Every body believes in his own identity, and in the existence of an external world, although comparatively few have thought of these truths in express terms. It would, therefore, be more proper to speak of a man's belief in his identity than of his assent to his identity; of his belief in the existence of matter than of his assent to it; but we might with perfect propriety speak of his assent to the proposition that matter exists.

The term opinion is used by Locke, in some passages of his Essay, as synonymous with belief and assent, but there is a wide difference in its general acceptation. It is seldom, if ever, used in reference to subjects which are certain or demonstrable. We talk

of a person's opinions in religion or politics, but not in algebra or geometry, and so far the last named philosopher and common usage are in accordance; but he appears to have sometimes forgotten that the term, in its ordinary sense, denotes not the state of the mind, but the subject of belief, the thing or the proposition believed. Thus we say to receive, to hold, and to renounce an opinion.

The distinctions here pointed out are not, however, very closely observed. On the contrary, it is surprising that words of so much importance should be employed with so little precision. Belief is often indiscriminately used to express a state or affection of the understanding, a proposition believed, a doctrine, and a collection of doctrines. In the following pages it will simply denote the state or affection of the mind, while the term opinion will be employed (in reference to propositions of a probable nature) to designate that which is believed

It may be remarked, that whatever we

believe may be thrown into the form of a proposition; and when we say of such a proposition that we believe it, it is equivalent to saying that it appears to us to be true. The expressions are exactly synonymous, or convertible; for it would be a manifest contradiction to assert that we believed a proposition which did not appear true to us, or that a proposition appeared true which we did not believe.

SECTION II.

ON THE INDEPENDENCE OF BELIEF ON THE WILL.

It has been frequently asserted, and still more frequently assumed, that belief is, in many cases, a voluntary act of the mind. In what cases, however, it is dependant on the will, few writers have ventured to state in direct terms; nor do I know that the subject has ever been examined with that closeness of attention which its importance deserves. If it were a point of mere speculative curiosity, it would scarcely be worth while to rescue it from the vagueness in which it has hitherto remained; but the fact is, that many of the actions, as well as many of the moral judgments of mankind, proceed on an assumption of the voluntary nature of belief, and it therefore becomes of practical moment to ascertain how far that assumption is founded in truth. Of the justness of this

remark we shall have occasion in the sequel to adduce ample proof.

It may be observed, in the first place, that there are a great number of facts and propositions, in regard to our belief of which it is universally allowed that the will can have no power, and motives no efficacy. A mathematical axiom, for instance, cannot be doubted by any man who comprehends the terms in which it is expressed, however ardent may be his desire to disbelieve it. Threats and torments would be in vain employed to compel a geometrician to dissent from a proposition in Euclid. He might be compelled to assert the falsity of the proposition, but all the powers in the universe could not make him believe what he thus asserted. In the same way, no hopes nor fears, no menaces nor allurements, could at all affect a man's belief in a matter of fact which happened under his own observation. The remark is also true of innumerable facts which we have received on the testimony of others. That there have been such men as Cæsar and Cicero, Pope and Newton, and

that there are at present such cities as Paris and Vienna, it is impossible to disbelieve by any effort of the will.

In those cases, therefore, where the evidence is of such a nature as to produce universal assent, it is acknowledged by all that the will can have no power over our convictions. If it exercises any control at all, we must look for it in those subjects which admit of diversity of opinion. But the belief, doubt, or disbelief which a man entertains of any proposition, which others regard with different sentiments, may be the same in strength and every other respect as the belief, doubt, or disbelief which he entertains of a proposition in regard to which there is entire unanimity; and if in the latter case his opinion is involuntary, there can be no reason to suppose it otherwise in the former. The mere circumstance of others taking a different view of the subject (of which he may be altogether unaware) can have no tendency to render his belief more liable to be affected by motives, or, in other words, to bring it under the control of the will.

It will, perhaps, be generally granted, that decided belief, or decided disbelief, when once engendered in the mind, cannot be affected by volition. This influence is usually placed in the middle region of suspense and doubt, and it is supposed, that when the understanding is in a state of fluctuation between two opinions, it is in the power of the will to determine the decision. The state of doubt, however, will be found to be no more subject to the will than any other state of the intellect. All the various degrees of belief and disbelief, from the fullest conviction to doubt, and from doubt to absolute incredulity, correspond to the degree of evidence, or to the nature of the considerations present to the mind. To be in doubt is to want that degree or kind of evidence which produces belief; and while the evidence remains the same, without addition or diminution, the mind must continue in doubt.* The understanding, it is clear,

* Belief appears to be the firmest when there are no hostile or contrary considerations for the mind to rest upon. In proportion to the number and import-

cannot believe a proposition on precisely the same evidence as that on which it previously doubted it, and yet to ascribe to mere volition a change from doubt to conviction is asserting that this may take place; it is affirming that a man, without the slightest reason, may, if he please, believe to-day what he doubted yesterday.

It may be alleged, perhaps, that it is not necessary to suppose the understanding to believe a proposition on the same evidence as that on which it previously doubted it, since the will may have the power of changing the character of the evidence. This implies that it may be capable either of

ance of contrary considerations belief is impaired, and if they are increased to a certain extent, it fades into doubt. The latter is often a state of oscillation, in which the mind passes from one class of arguments to another, the predominant affection of the moment according with the arguments on which the contemplation happens to be fixed. The mind may also be said to be in doubt when it is acquainted with neither side of a question, and has therefore no grounds for a determinate opinion. The one may be called active or positive, the other passive or negative doubt.

raising additional ideas in the mind, or of detaching some of the ideas already there from the rest with which they are associated, and dismissing them from view. But it is acknowledged by our best metaphysical writers,* that by mere volition we cannot call up any idea, nor, therefore, any number of ideas forming an argument; such an operation necessarily implying the actual presence of the ideas before the will is exerted: it is also impossible for us to choose what ideas shall be introduced into the mind by any topic on which we bestow our attention; and it is manifest, that when ideas have been once joined together, we cannot prevent them from suggesting each other according to the regular laws of association. In the examination of any subject, therefore, certain ideas will arise in our minds independently of the will; and, as long as we fix our attention on that subject, we cannot avoid the consequent suggestions, nor single out any part and forget the rest. We may,

* See Lord Kames's Elements of Criticism, and Dugald Stewart's Philosophy of the Human Mind.

it is true, by the help of external means, or even by an internal effort, dismiss a subject entirely from our thoughts; we may get rid of it by turning our attention to something else; but while we continue to reflect upon it, we cannot prevent it from suggesting those ideas, which, from the habits, character, and constitution of our minds, it is calculated to excite.

We come then to the conclusion, that since the same considerations present to the mind must invariably produce the same belief, doubt, or disbelief, and since volition can neither introduce any additional considerations, nor dismiss what are already present, the will can have no influence on belief; or, in other words, belief, doubt, and disbelief, are involuntary states of the intellect.

But the proof of the involuntary nature of belief depends not on the justness of any metaphysical argument. Every one may bring the question to the test of experiment; he may appeal to his own consciousness, and try whether, in any conceivable case, he can at pleasure change his opinion, and

he will soon become sensible of the inefficacy of the attempt.* Take any controverted fact in history; let a man make himself perfectly acquainted with the statements and authorities on both sides, and, at the end of his investigation, he will either believe, doubt, or disbelieve the fact in question. Now apply any possible motive to his mind. Blame him, praise him, intimidate him by threats, or allure him by promises, and after all your efforts, how far will you have succeeded in changing the state of his intellect in relation to the fact? How far will you have altered the connection which he discerns between certain premises and certain conclusions? To affect his belief you must affect the subject of it by producing new arguments or considerations. The understanding being passive as to the impressions made upon it, if you wish to change those impressions you must change the cause which produces them. You can alter perceptions only by altering the thing perceived. Every

* See Note A.

man's consciousness will tell him, that the will can no more modify the effect of an argument on the understanding, than it can change the taste of sugar to the palate, or the fragrance of a rose to the smell; and that nothing can weaken its force, as apprehended by the intellect, but another argument opposed to it.

SECTION III.

ON THE OPINIONS OF LOCKE AND SOME OTHER WRITERS ON THIS SUBJECT.

THE view which we have just taken, of the involuntary nature of belief, coincides with that which Locke has presented to us in the following passage, as well as in other parts of his Essay.

"As knowledge," says he, "is no more arbitrary than perception; so I think assent is no more in our power than knowledge. When the agreement of any two ideas appears to our minds, whether immediately or by the assistance of reason, I can no more refuse to perceive, no more avoid knowing it, than I can avoid seeing those objects which I turn my eyes to, and look on in daylight: and what upon full examination I find the most probable, I cannot deny my assent to. But though we cannot hinder our knowledge, where the agreement is once

perceived, nor our assent, where the probability manifestly appears upon due consideration of all the measures of it; yet we can hinder both knowledge and assent, by stopping our enquiry, and not employing our faculties in the search of any truth."*

It is not to be concealed, however, that this powerful reasoner frequently makes use of language implying belief to be an affair of the will, although there is only one case which he specifically points out as an exception to the general remark in the preceding extract.

"I think," says he, "we may conclude, that in propositions, where though the proofs in view are of most moment, yet there are sufficient grounds to suspect that there is either fallacy in words, or certain proofs as considerable to be produced on the contrary side; there assent, suspense, or dissent, are often voluntary actions."†

Here he has evidently mistaken the effect of an argument on the understanding for an

* Essay on the Understanding, book iv, chapter 20.

† *Ibidem.*

act of the will. To have "sufficient grounds to suspect either fallacy in words, or certain proofs as considerable to be produced on the contrary side," is to be already in doubt, or in the state called suspense; and consequently our suspense cannot be occasioned by subsequent volition, much less can it be converted by the will into assent or dissent.

Locke has in fact asserted, first, that the mind may be in doubt from a consideration presented to the understanding, and then, that in consequence of this doubt it may voluntarily suspend its opinion; or, in other words, voluntarily doubt what it before doubted involuntarily.

The case adduced is analogous to that of a surveyor, who in taking the dimensions of a piece of timber should be led to suspect the correctness of the instrument which he employed. The suspicion would be manifestly involuntary, and could be removed only by a proof of its being unfounded. That in the instance alleged by Locke, or in any instance, assent, suspense, and dissent are voluntary actions, is moreover inconsist-

ent with his former admission, that assent must follow or be determined by the greater manifest probability. For, if a greater apparent probability unavoidably produces assent, a smaller apparent probability opposed to it must produce dissent; and two equal probabilities poised against each other (which is the only remaining case that can possibly occur) must either produce uncertainty, or one of them must produce the same effect as a greater probability, and the other the same effect as a smaller probability. Thus two opposite and unequal effects would be made to result from two equal causes. And if to believe a proposition is the same thing as for that proposition to appear to the mind more probable than its opposite, then to say, that a man may believe if he choose one of two equally probable propositions, and disbelieve the other, is to say, that by an act of the will two propositions may appear equally and unequally probable at the same time.

In the writings of another celebrated philosopher, Dr. Reid, we find the doctrine, that belief is independent of the will, stated with-

out any such exception as that which has been the subject of the preceding animadversions.

"It is not in our power," says this acute writer, "to judge as we will. The judgment is carried along necessarily by the evidence, real or seeming, which appears to us at the time. But in propositions that are submitted to our judgment there is this great difference; some are of such a nature that a man of ripe understanding may apprehend them distinctly, and perfectly understand their meaning without finding himself under any necessity of believing them to be true or false, probable or improbable. The judgment remains in suspense, until it is inclined on one side or another by reasons or arguments."*

That Dr. Reid did not ascribe this suspense of the judgment to any exertion of the will is sufficiently evident from the manner in which he expresses himself. It is scarcely necessary to adduce the following

* Essays on the Intellectual Powers, page 555, 4to. edition.

passage by way of corroboration, but it is too explicit and too much in point not to be presented to the reader.

"Every degree of evidence, perceived by the mind, produces a proportioned degree of assent or belief. The judgment may be in perfect suspense between two contradictory opinions, when there is no evidence for either, or equal evidence for both. The least preponderancy on one side inclines the judgment in proportion. Belief is mixed with doubt, more or less, until we come to the highest degree of evidence, when all doubt vanishes, and the belief is firm and immoveable. This degree of evidence, the highest the human faculties can attain, we call certainty."*

Lord Bacon, in several parts of his writings, appears to have entertained similar views on this subject, although, as he never made it a matter of separate consideration; and only incidentally mentions it, his language cannot be expected to be uniformly

* Essays on the Intellectual Powers, page 691, 4to. edition.

consistent. In one remarkable passage he directly asserts the independence of belief on the will, and distinctly points out the only way in which it can be controlled.

"The commandment of knowledge," says he, "is yet higher than the commandment over the will; for it is a commandment over the reason, belief, and understanding of man, which is the highest part of the mind, and giveth law to the will itself: for there is no power on earth, which setteth up a throne, or chair of state, in the spirits and souls of men, and in their cogitations, imaginations, opinions, and beliefs, but knowledge and learning."*

* Of the Proficience and Advancement of Learning, book i.

SECTION IV.

ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH HAVE LED MEN TO REGARD BELIEF AS VOLUNTARY.

It is natural to enquire, why the affection or state of mind, which we term belief, should be considered as depending on the will any more than other affections or states of mind; why the discernment of truth and error should be considered as voluntary, and the discernment of other qualities as involuntary. We cannot alter at pleasure the appearances of objects, nor the sentiments which they occasion. If we open our eyes we must see things as they are, and receive the impressions which they are fitted to produce. Fields will appear barren or fertile, hills low or lofty, rivers wide or narrow, men and women handsome or ugly, pleasant or disagreeable. If we take up a book its language will appear to us refined or vulgar, its figures apt or inappropriate, its images

beautiful or inelegant, its matter well or ill arranged, its narrative pathetic, or lively, or uninteresting; and we think not of ascribing these impressions to the will; why then, when we go a step farther, and find its arguments convincing, or doubtful, or inconclusive, should that be considered as a voluntary act?

The common error, of regarding belief as dependant on volition, may perhaps be mainly ascribed to the intimate connection subsisting between belief and the expression or declaration of it, the latter of which is at all times an act of the will. So close is this connection, and so frequently do they coincide, that the same language is often applicable to both. It is not, therefore, surprising, that they have been confounded together, and even received one common appellation, for the term assent is used to express the intimation of our concurrence with an opinion as well as the concurrence itself, our ostensible as well as our real belief. By this intimate connection and frequent coincidence, men have been in-

advertently led to attribute the properties belonging to an external sign to the state or affection of the mind, and have drawn their inferences as if the two things were exactly identical. As we can refuse to express our agreement with a proposition, so, it has been assumed, we can refuse to believe it; and as motives have power to induce a man to declare his assent, so it has been taken for granted they have the power of inducing him to yield his credence.

Our best writers and acutest metaphysicians speak of yielding or withholding our belief, granting or refusing our assent, all which are evidently phrases transferred from the external profession to the internal act. They can be regarded with propriety only as figurative expressions; and if they are defensible on the ground of the necessity of explaining the phenomena of the mind by a reference to physical events, their figurative character should never be overlooked.

It is trite to remark, that, in treating of the mental powers, it is but too common to found conclusions on the literal interpretation

of metaphorical phrases, as if the operations of the mind corresponded exactly with those physical operations which supplied the language used in describing them.

We cannot keep too steadily in view the distinction here pointed out, between the state of the understanding and the outward declaration, between internal and external assent. To the neglect of it may be traced almost all the vagueness, sophistry, and inconsistency on the subject of belief, which abound, as well in the writings of moralists and metaphysicians, as in the opinions, practices, and institutions of society. We ought always to bear in mind, that what a man affirms may be totally at variance with what he believes; and that whatever power we may exert over his professions by allurements or intimidation, by the application of pleasure or of pain, his internal conviction can be reached by nothing but considerations addressed to his intellect.

Another source of error on this subject has probably been the practice of confounding the consent of the understanding with that

of the will or the feelings. The term assent is often applied indiscriminately to both, and doubtless this confusion has sometimes suggested wrong inferences. Dr. Johnson has furnished an instance of the ease with which these two very different things may be confounded by their common right to the same term. He defines assent to be "the act of agreeing to any thing," and supports his interpretation by the following examples :—

"Without the King's *assent* or knowledge
You wrought to be a legate."

SHAKESPEARE, Henry VIII.

"All the arguments on both sides must be laid in balance, and, upon the whole, the understanding determine its *assent*."

LOCKE.

In the first of these examples, the term is evidently used, not to express opinion or belief, but the consent or concurrence of the will; in the second it implies the consent of the understanding. The expression, "act of agreeing," may be employed indifferently for either; but agreeing to a measure or a proposal is obviously a very different thing from agreeing with an argument or a proposition.

In attempting to account for the error of regarding belief as voluntary, it is important to remark, that it may have arisen, in some degree, from the circumstance of many people having no real conception of the truth or falsehood of those opinions which they profess. They adopt an opinion according to their interest or their passions; or, in other words, they undertake to assert some particular doctrine, and regard as adversaries all who oppose it. Without any reference to its import, they look upon it as a thing to be maintained, a post to be defended. In this sense, and with such people, opinions may be said to be voluntary, and being mere professions, forming a sort of party badge, and having no dependence on the understanding, they may be assumed and discarded at pleasure.

It may perhaps be asserted with truth, that in regard to some subjects or other, all mankind are in this predicament; and opinions thus taken up are often maintained with more violence than such as are founded on the most thorough conviction. They are

maintained, not for the sake of truth, nor from the desire natural to man of impressing upon others what he sincerely believes, but for the support of that interest, or the gratification of that passion, on account of which they were originally adopted. By thus defending opinions of which they have no clear conviction, people often succeed in imposing on themselves as well as on others. Paradoxical as it may seem, it is nevertheless true, that they are not always aware of the exact state of their own minds; they frequently imagine themselves to believe more than they are actually convinced of. On many questions they are not able to form any definite decision, and yet, from the necessity of professing some opinion, or joining some party, and from the habit of making assertions, and even arguing in favour of what they are thus pledged to support, they come to regard themselves as entertaining positive sentiments on points about which they are really in doubt.

To solve this apparent paradox it is necessary to reflect, that as it is impossible for us

to have all the considerations on which our opinions are founded at once and all subjects present to the mind, our opinions are on most occasions simply objects of memory, results at which we recollect to have arrived without at the moment recollecting the process. In this way we believe propositions on the strength of our recollection, and perhaps the considerations on which they are founded present themselves only on occasions when it is necessary, for our own satisfaction or for the conviction of others, to retrace or restate them. Hence it is obviously possible for even an acute logician to be mistaken as to the opinions about which he has attained a decisive conviction, and not to find out his mistake till he is reduced to the necessity of recollecting, or rather repeating, the process through which he had originally gone. When he is thus driven back on the merits of the question, he finds and feels himself doubtful as to points on which he imagined his mind to have been previously satisfied. If men, who are capable of estimating evidence, of pur-

suing a train of argument, and of reflecting on the operations of their own minds, are sometimes liable to this kind of deception, we need not wonder to find it common amongst such as have scarcely any definite notions, or any power of self-introspection.

To return to the remark which led to this digression, it may be observed, that the practice of adopting and maintaining opinions without any actual conviction must necessarily give them the appearance of depending on the will, and what is true of mere professions is naturally and easily transferred to opinions which have really possession of the understanding.

SECTION V.

ON THE SOURCES OF DIFFERENCES OF OPINION.

ALTHOUGH belief is an involuntary state of the mind, yet like many other involuntary affections and events, it may, in some circumstances, be partially controlled by our voluntary actions. Sleep is involuntary, but it may, to a certain extent, be prevented or induced according to our pleasure; and in a similar manner, although we have no power to believe or disbelieve as we choose, yet there are cases in which we may imperfectly modify our belief, by subjecting our minds to the operation of such evidence as promises to gratify our inclination in its result. We may, at any time, be unfair and partial in the examination of a question. We may turn our attention from the arguments on one side, and direct all its keenness to those on the other; and notwithstanding some latent

suspicions of a contrary nature, springing from the consciousness of a want of candour, we may possibly by such means lessen our doubts about an opinion which we desire to think true.

If we had already a clear and full conviction of the truth of any doctrine, perhaps no partiality of attention in favour of the opposite side could effect an alteration in our opinion; but in all cases where our views were vague, or our minds uninformed, an exclusive devotion to one side of the evidence might have a material influence on our conclusions. In such cases, a man has in some degree the power of making his opinions follow in the track of his inclinations.

Let us suppose the case of one, who perceived that it would be greatly to his interest to hold a certain doctrine, on which he had hitherto bestowed only a vague consideration. Unless he had more than common magnanimity, he would naturally endeavour to free himself from any doubts which might be floating in his mind. He would, therefore, make himself acquainted with all the

arguments which had been urged on that side of the question to which his inclinations were directed, and shun all of a contrary nature, and by such a system of exclusion he might be successful in his object. Even in this case, however, considerations might present themselves to his mind which would counteract all his efforts, and force upon him the very conviction he was endeavouring to avoid. Though he might choose what written or oral arguments should operate on his understanding, he could have no power over the result; he would have no control over the intellectual machinery which those arguments might set in motion in his own mind.

This wilful partiality of attention or examination is the only way in which our opinions can be purposely affected by our actions, or in which we can exercise any control over the formation of our opinions; and its effects are obviously very circumscribed and uncertain. By a cursory glance at those sources of diversity of opinion which have no dependence on the will, it will be seen that they are perfectly sufficient to ac-

count for most of the differences which exist; and that an intentional partiality in our investigations can have but a slender influence amidst the operation of causes so much more powerful.

The external circumstances in which men are placed, as they vary in the case of every individual, must necessarily occasion different ideas to be presented to each mind, different associations to be established even amongst the same ideas, and of course different opinions to be formed. It may be truly said, indeed, that in no instance have the ideas presented to two individuals, throughout the course of their lives, collectively agreed or corresponded precisely in their order and connection. Amongst the external circumstances here alluded to, perhaps the most striking are those which we see operating on whole nations. In general, the casualty of being brought into the world in a particular country inevitably determines the greater part of a man's opinions; and of the rest, there are few which do not owe their origin to the rank and family in which

he happens to be born, and to the characters of the other human beings by whom he is surrounded. Even the extraordinary views, which open to the man of original genius, are often the result of various ideas suggested by his peculiar situation, and presented to his conception in a particular order and concomitance.

A great portion of the opinions of mankind are notoriously propagated by transmission from one generation to another, without any possible option on the part of those into whose minds they are instilled. A child regards as true whatever his teachers choose to inculcate, and whatever he discovers to be believed by those around him. His creed is thus insensibly formed, and he will continue in after-life to believe the same things, without any proof, provided his knowledge and experience do not happen to impinge on their falsehood. Mere instillation is sufficient to make him believe any proposition, although he should be utterly ignorant of the foundation on which it rests, or the evidence by which it is supported. It may

create in his mind a belief of the most palpable absurdities; things, as it appears to others, not only contradicted by his reason, but at variance with the testimony of his senses; and in the boundless field, which the senses do not reach, there is nothing too preposterous to be palmed on his credulity. The religious opinions of the majority of mankind are necessarily acquired in this way: from the nature of the case they cannot be otherwise than derivative, and they are as firmly believed, without the least particle of evidence, as the theorems of Euclid by those who understand the demonstrations. Men do not suspect their religious creed to be false, because the grounds of its truth or its falsity lie altogether without the pale of their knowledge and remote from the path of their experience, and because, when they have been accustomed to connect certain ideas together in their infancy, it grows beyond the power of their imagination to disjoin them. Nor is it merely definite opinions which are acquired

in this manner, but a thousand associations are established in the mind, which influence their judgments in matters with which they subsequently become conversant.

Thus the external circumstances in which men are placed unavoidably occasion, without any choice on their part, the chief diversities of opinion existing in the world. National circumstances occasion national, and individual circumstances individual peculiarities of thinking. On this point, indeed, there can be no dispute. The most strenuous advocates (if such there are) for the power of the will over belief, will not deny the influence of the causes adduced: they will readily acknowledge that it is impossible for all men to think alike, when their circumstances are so essentially dissimilar. The principal question to consider, and that which bears more peculiarly on the design of the present essay, is not why so many various opinions are prevalent in the world, but how, if belief is perfectly independent of the will, shall we account for the fact, that

the same events or the same arguments produce different effects on different minds, or, in other words, give rise to different opinions.

This fact, which is a matter of common observation, may at first sight appear to be inconsistent with the position maintained in a former chapter, that the same considerations present to the mind will invariably produce the same opinion. The inconsistency, however, will vanish when we reflect, that in the one case are meant only the external or ostensible arguments, the considerations expressed in language and submitted to the senses; but, in the other case, the whole combination of ideas in view of the understanding. Were language so perfect, that the same words would convey precisely the same ideas to every individual, and could the understanding be strictly limited to the ideas alone conveyed by the words employed, then the arguments submitted to our eyes or ears, and the considerations present to the mind, would exactly coincide, and there could be no difference of opinion respecting any proposition whatever.

This remark indicates the sources whence different conclusions from the same arguments must arise. They must originate either in that defect of language, in consequence of which the terms employed do not convey to every mind the same ideas, or in those circumstances which occasion other ideas, besides those actually expressed (and different ideas in the case of different individuals), to present themselves to the understanding: to which we may add such circumstances as, when the original arguments or consequent suggestions are numerous and complicated, have a tendency to fix the attention of different persons on different parts, and thereby occasion different considerations to remain ultimately in view.

That the terms employed, in many subjects, do not convey the same ideas to every understanding, is a defect in language, as an instrument of communication, which has often been explained and lamented. Since language is conventional, involving an arbitrary connection between ideas and sounds, all men have to learn as well as they can to

affix the same notions to the same signs. In regard to complex ideas this cannot always be accomplished, and hence a term may stand for one thing in the mind of one person, and for a different thing in the mind of another. When such terms, therefore, are used in any proposition, it is not surprising that various opinions are entertained of its verisimilitude. This is so obvious a source of diversity of opinion, that it requires no farther exposition. We may, therefore, proceed to the consideration of the other circumstances which occasion different conclusions from the same arguments.

If we examine the procedure of the understanding, when it is considering any train of argument offered to it, we shall find that almost every idea, at least every proposition in the train, awakens other ideas and propositions: and the ultimate impression left on the mind is the joint result of both. It is not only what a book expresses but what it suggests which determines its effect on the reader; and, consequently, whatever occasions the same arguments to suggest different

considerations or combinations of thought to different minds may be ranked amongst those sources of discrepancies in opinion which we are investigating.

One circumstance, which must have a powerful effect in determining the character of these suggestions, is the natural constitution of the mind. The endless variety of original talent, and degrees of intellectual power, to be found amongst men, implies as endless a variety in the modes in which their ideas are associated and suggested. Hence a diversity of judgment will inevitably ensue. Or, if we choose to vary the phraseology, we may say, that the powers of conception and discrimination in different persons are unequal, and since their intellectual vision extends not to the same depth and distance, their views cannot be alike. Whatever language we employ on this subject, it is sufficiently manifest, that the natural disparity in the understandings of mankind must be a cause of diversity in the trains of thought which any occasion may suggest, and must thus beget contrarieties of judgment.

A still more powerful circumstance tending to modify the combinations of thought, suggested by any set of arguments, is the nature of the ideas, associations, prejudices, and opinions, already in the mind. The train of ideas and considerations, which rises at the contemplation of an object, may not, as a whole, resemble any antecedent train, but its various parts must evidently be composed of ideas preconceived and familiar. Hence the diversities of opinion which the external circumstances of mankind have created, the peculiarities of thinking in sects and nations, the intellectual habits of professions, and the local prejudices of individuals, may all become causes of various conclusions from the same arguments. To feel the full force of this remark, we have only to consider, what different ideas would crowd upon the mind of a whig and a tory during the perusal of the same political essay; or how totally dissimilar would be the train of thought, awakened by the same theological treatise, in the understanding of an Italian monk and an English dissenter. Of all the cir-

cumstances, which determine the various judgments of mankind on any particular subject, perhaps that which we have just noticed is not only of the greatest force but of the greatest importance, since it has the principal share in moulding their opinions in moral, theological, and political science. It is, however, so completely obvious as to supersede the necessity of any farther endeavour to illustrate it; and we shall, therefore, proceed in the next section to the consideration of a not less interesting source of diversity of judgment, to be found in the influence possessed by the sensitive over the intellectual part of our nature.*

* It may probably appear, that in this section we are resolving all reasoning into association, which has been termed (with what justice we cannot stop to examine) a mere verbal generalization. In reality, however, we are only proceeding on the indisputable fact, that, in the examination of any subject, certain ideas and propositions do come into the mind. There must be some cause or causes why every one of these presents itself: the will is evidently not one of these causes, for reasons before assigned; and we are endeavouring to point out what they are, or at least such of them as vary in different individuals.

SECTION VI.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED. SOURCES OF DIFFERENCES OF OPINION IN THE FEELINGS AND PASSIONS OF MANKIND.

In entering upon the subject of the present section it may be well to repeat the remark, that the causes of the various conclusions, which men draw from the same arguments, are to be sought for in the imperfection of language, in the circumstances which regulate our trains of thought, and in whatever tends to excite or fix the attention in a partial manner. It is in the power of producing the two latter effects, that the peculiar influence possessed by the sensitive over the intellectual part of our nature seems to consist. There is no remark more frequent, no maxim more current in the world, than that

a man's opinions are influenced by his interest and passions.* This is so manifest, that we can often predict, from a knowledge of his situation and relations in society, what sentiments, on a given subject, he will profess and maintain. Much of the influence thus apparently exerted by passion on the opinions of mankind, extends however, in reality, only to their professions. Many doctrines, as we have already remarked, are adopted without any real conviction: they are merely ostensible assumptions, not indications of the actual state of the understanding; and what a man thus professes may be expected, of course, to accord with his interest or passions. But laying all these out of the question, there is indisputably an influence exerted by emotions and passions over the understanding itself. They have sometimes the effect of making that argument appear valid to one man which is

* "Intellectus humanus," says Lord Bacon, "luminis sicci non est; sed recipit infusionem a voluntate et affectibus."—*Novum Organum*, lib. i.

regarded as inconclusive by another; in a word, of begetting various opinions on the same subject.

This effect is partly to be accounted for, as before stated, by their power of awakening peculiar trains of ideas. The same words, or the same objects, will rouse combinations of thought in the mind when it is labouring under melancholy, of a totally different character from those which they suggest during a state of cheerfulness; and, in a similar manner, all the various emotions and passions, by which we are affected, occasionally operate as principles of suggestion. If, therefore, the effect of any arguments on the understanding depends both on the arguments themselves and the ideas and considerations which they suggest, the various effects of the same arguments, on such as attend to them, may be partly ascribed to the states of feeling in which such persons happen to be.

The other way in which the passions and emotions of men influence their opinions, and cause them to receive different im-

pressions from the same arguments, may deserve a fuller elucidation. When those arguments form a train or series of considerable length and complexity, it is obviously impossible that they should all be present to the mind together, or at the same moment. The understanding must survey them in detail; and its ultimate decision will depend on those which have chiefly excited its attention, and remain in view at the close of the scrutiny. Whatever, therefore, occasions any of the arguments to come before the mind more frequently, and remain in view more permanently, than the rest; or, in other words, whatever fixes the attention on some more than others, will naturally affect its decision. The remark applies not only to the arguments actually submitted to us, but also to all the ideas and considerations which they suggest.

This attribute, of drawing and fixing the attention, belongs in a remarkable degree to all strong emotions. Every one must have felt, while he has been affected by any particular passion, that he could scarcely

attend to any thing but what had some connection with it; he must have experienced its power of presenting exclusive and strong views, its despotism in banishing all but its own ideas. Fear, for example, may so concentrate our thoughts on some particular features of our situation, may so absorb our attention, that we may overlook all other circumstances, and be led to conclusions which would be instantly rejected by a dispassionate understanding.

While the mind is in this state of excitement, it has a sort of elective attraction (if we may borrow an illustration from chemical science) for some ideas to the neglect of all others. It singles out from the number presented to it those which are connected with the prevailing emotion, while the rest are overlooked and forgotten. In examining any question, it may really comprehend all the arguments submitted to it; but, at the conclusion of the review, those only are retained which have been illuminated by the predominant passion; and since opinions, as we have seen, are the result of the con-

siderations which have been attended to and are in sight, not of such as have been overlooked and have vanished, it is those by which the judgment will be determined.

In this way self-interest, hope, fear, love, hatred, and the other passions, may any of them draw the mind from a perfect survey of a subject, and fix its attention on a partial view, may exaggerate the importance of some objects and diminish that of others, and by this virtual distortion of appearances affect its perceptions of truth.

The peculiar effects of passion, which we have been describing, are evidently involuntary, and perhaps few are conscious of them in their own case, but such as have been accustomed to examine the movements of their sensitive and intellectual powers. It deserves to be remarked likewise, that our good as well as our bad passions, our kind as well as our malevolent feelings, may equally operate as principles of suggestion; and being also equally conducive to that partiality of attention, that peculiar vividness of ideas, which we have attempted to

explain, are of course equally liable to mislead the judgment.

We are prepared by these observations to examine the justness of the common saying, "quod volumus facile credimus," "we readily believe what is agreeable to our wishes," a saying which may at first sight seem at variance with our former conclusions. This, like many other maxims current in the world, points at a truth without much precision. Mere wishes have in fact no influence on the understanding; they are totally inoperative till there appears to be some reason for expecting what we wish, till, in short, they are transformed into hope, and then we are strongly disposed to believe what is consonant with our anticipations. If instead of having a ground for hope, we have a reason for fear, our apprehension disposes us, in the same way, to believe the reverse of what we wish. Thus, so far is it from being true, that mere wishes tend to beget readiness of belief, we here see that there are cases in which we have a readiness to believe what is repugnant to our wishes.

In the instances both of hope and of fear, there must be considerations presented to the understanding to produce them; and those passions subsequently react upon the intellect, by concentrating its attention upon the considerations to which they owe their birth, and upon others of a similar tendency. This effect is evidently not attributable to the will, on which hope and fear are themselves perfectly independent.

The manner, in which the emotions of any one operate on his belief, may receive illustration from what takes place when the peculiar circumstances, by which a man is surrounded, tend to keep some considerations appertaining to a disputable subject more steadily before his attention than others. If it be true, that our feelings affect our belief by the vividness which they impart to particular ideas, or, what is the same thing, by turning the attention more intensely on such ideas; then whatever has the tendency to create the same partiality of attention, must have a corresponding effect on our opinions. Such a cause may be found

in the sentiments of those amongst whom a man happens to be thrown. In the majority of instances, however dissimilar the opinions of an individual may have originally been, they will gradually conform to those of the community at large, or at least of his immediate associates; an effect which takes place, not because the arguments for the latter are stronger than those of the opposite side, but because they are perpetually kept before his mind, to the exclusion of adverse considerations*. Thus we sometimes see instances of men, who are led to entertain a peculiar opinion, but who, on finding all around them dissent from it, and discovering it to be the object of reproach and invective, begin to be staggered in their faith, and grow more and more doubtful, till the general voice has triumphed over their sentiments and reduced

* "Our opinions of all kinds," says Hume, "are strongly affected by society and sympathy, and it is almost impossible for us to support any principle or sentiment against the universal consent of every one, with whom we have any friendship or correspondence." —*A Dissertation on the Passions.*

them to acquiescence. In this case, the circumstance of the general opinion being against them withdraws their attention from their own peculiar views, forcibly and continually fixing it on the considerations which influence others. The sentiments of their fellow creatures draw around them a circle of attraction, from which they can rarely step to contemplate other objects; and they gradually lose their peculiarities of thinking, from the mere circumstance of the considerations on which they are founded being seldom presented to their understandings. It is on the same principle that some of the most striking effects of eloquence are to be accounted for. Who, that has listened to some masterly exhibition of opinions contrary to his own, but has felt his mind shaken from its confirmed principles, till the vividness of the impression has died away, and suffered other considerations to reappear?

In regard to a single and perfectly independent proposition, there is evidently no room for any difference of opinion, except

that which may arise from affixing different ideas to the same terms. As few propositions, nevertheless, are so independent as not to be connected in some way with others, when any one is singly presented to the mind we generally form our estimate of it by the application of arguments and considerations, which are naturally suggested in the various modes already described. But when a question involves a long train of propositions, each of which may depend on many others, there is infinitely more room for the operation of ambiguities of language, preconceived notions, inequalities of intellect, and diversities of feeling. In considering such a question, moreover, it is impossible to have all the arguments which bear upon it present at once to the recollection; a thousand considerations will pass before the mind, prompted by passion or prejudice, or other causes; and those, to which the state of our feelings or any other circumstance has given an adventitious prominence, will naturally remain in view and determine our opinions.

Emotions, it is obvious, have less room to operate in proportion to the perspicuity of our views. With regard to opinions of which we have a distinct and thorough conviction, the state of our feelings can make no difference.

The process of reasoning, by which we perceive them to be demonstrated, may be so clear and forcible, that the passions can have as little effect as in the consideration of a geometrical theorem. It is only in regard to vague opinions, arising from the complicated and doubtful nature of the subject, or from partial and indistinct views, that the feelings can have any great influence; and they may accordingly be expected to have considerable power in the consideration of questions which furnish various conflicting arguments, and in the case of men whose notions are loose and undefined, without the ties of logical dependence and consistent principle.

It would be vain, perhaps, to attempt an estimate of the comparative efficiency of the causes producing diversity of opinion, since

they doubtless affect different minds in different proportions. Some men are infinitely less affected by hereditary prejudices than others; some are full of feeling; some dispassionate; some are of weak and confused, and some of clear and vigorous intellects.

With regard to the major part of mankind, however, it will not be disputed, that traditionary prejudices and early associations have a predominant influence, imparting a tincture to every subject, and leaving traces in every conclusion.

Any of the causes, which have been enumerated, acting singly, might be expected to create considerable diversities of sentiment; but when we reflect, that several are generally in operation at the same time, we cannot hesitate to pronounce them perfectly adequate to account for all those varieties of opinion, in relation to the same subject, which are daily exposed to our observation.

SECTION VII.

ON BELIEF AND OPINIONS AS OBJECTS OF MORAL APPROBATION AND DISAPPROBATION, REWARDS AND PUNISHMENTS.

THE remarks in the preceding part of this Essay, if they are correct, necessarily lead to some important conclusions. By the universal consent of the reason and feelings of mankind, what is involuntary cannot involve any merit or demerit on the part of the agent. Results which are not the consequences of volition cannot be the proper objects of moral praise and blame.* These

* Hume, indeed, has controverted this, but it would not, I think, be a difficult task to show the sources of his erroneous conclusions on the subject, were it necessary to combat a doctrine at variance with the whole of our moral feelings. See his Treatise on Morals. The common, or rather universal sentiment on this point, is thus expressed by Bishop Butler :— "We never, in the moral way, applaud or blame either ourselves or others for what we enjoy or what

are the dictates of nature, truths felt by all: even the child, who is reprehended by his parent for accidental mischief, instinctively prefers the plea, that he could not help it; and if we inquire into the final cause of this part of our nature, the reason of our being so constituted as to feel moral approbation and disapprobation only at those actions which are voluntary, we shall probably find it in the obvious circumstance, that it is such actions alone which praise and blame can promote and prevent.

It follows, that those states of the understanding which we term belief, doubt, and disbelief, inasmuch as they are not voluntary, nor the result of any exertion of the will, imply neither merit nor demerit in him who is the subject of them. Whatever be the

we suffer, or for having impressions made upon us which we consider as altogether out of our power; but only for what we do, or would have done, had it been in our power; or for what we leave undone which we might have done, or would have left undone, though we could have done it."—*Dissertation on the Nature of Virtue.*

state of a man's understanding in relation to any possible proposition, it is a state or affection devoid equally of desert and culpability. The nature of an opinion cannot make it criminal. In relation to the same subject, one may believe, another doubt, and a third disbelieve, and all with equal innocence.

There may, it is true, be considerable merit or demerit attached to the manner in which an inquiry is prosecuted. The labour and research which a man bestows, in order to determine any important question, and the impartiality with which he conducts the examination, may be entitled to our warmest applause. On the other hand, it is reprehensible for any one to be swayed in his conduct by interest or passion, to reject opportunities of information, to be designedly partial in examining evidence, to be deaf to whatever is urged on one side of a question, and lend all his attention to the other. These acts, although they may be totally ineffectual in accomplishing their aim, are all proper subjects of moral obloquy, and may

be left to the indignation and contempt which they deserve; but they relate to the conduct of men as to the selection of those circumstances or ideas which they allow to operate on their minds, and are not to be confounded with the states or affections of the understanding, on which it is possible, after all, that they may not produce the slightest effect*.

No one, perhaps, will dispute, that when a man acts without intentional partiality in the examination of a question, he cannot be at all culpable for the effect which follows, whether the research terminate in faith or incredulity; because it is the necessary and involuntary consequence of the views presented to his understanding, without the slightest interference of choice: but it will probably be alleged, that in so far as belief,

* It deserves to be remarked, that all institutions annexing advantages to the belief, or rather to the profession, of any fixed doctrines, have a tendency to beget this partiality of investigation; since every man, not totally destitute of integrity, will strive to make his opinions conformable to his professions.

doubt, and disbelief, have been the result of wilful partiality of attention, they may be regarded with propriety as culpable, since it is common to blame a man for those things, which, although involuntary in themselves, are the result of voluntary acts. To this it may be replied, that it is, to say the least, a want of precision to apply blame in such a manner: it is always more correct to regard men as culpable on account of their voluntary acts, than on account of the results over which volition has no immediate control. There would, nevertheless, be little objection to considering opinions as reprehensible in so far as they were the result of unfair investigation, if it could be rendered a useful or practical principle. In all cases where we make involuntary effects the objects of moral reprehension, it is because they are certain proofs or positive indications of the voluntary acts which have preceded them. Opinions, however, are not effects of this kind; they are not positive indications of any voluntary acts; they furnish no criterion of the fairness or unfairness of in-

vestigation, since the most opposite results, the most contrary opinions, may ensue from the same degree of impartiality and application. Voluntary partiality of attention, as we have already seen, can be at the utmost but of slight and casual efficiency in the formation of opinions; it has often no effect whatever, and its influence will always be mingled with that of more powerful causes. Hence the share which it has had in the production of belief, doubt, or disbelief, can never be ascertained by the nature of the result. Whether a man has been partial or impartial, in the process by which he has acquired his opinions, must be determined by extrinsic circumstances, and not by the character of the opinions themselves. Belief, doubt, and disbelief, therefore, can never, even in the character of indications of antecedent voluntary acts, be the proper objects of moral reprehension or commendation. Our approbation and disapprobation, if they fall anywhere, should be directed to the conduct of men in their researches, to the use which they make of

their opportunities of information, and to the partiality and impartiality visible in their actions.

If belief, doubt, and disbelief, are involuntary states of the understanding, which cannot be affected by the application of motives, and which can involve no moral merit or demerit, it follows, as a necessary consequence, that they do not fall within the province of legislation; that they are not proper subjects of rewards and punishments.

The only rational aim of rewards and punishments is to encourage and repress those actions or events to which they are applied. When they have no tendency to produce these effects, it is evidently absurd to apply them, since it is an employment of means which have no connection with the end to be produced. In this predicament is the application of rewards and punishments to the state of the understanding, or, in other words, to opinions. The allurements and the menaces of power are alike incapable of establishing opinions in the mind, or eradicating those which are already there. They may

draw hypocritical professions from avarice and ambition, or extort verbal renunciations from fear and feebleness; but this is all they can accomplish. The way to alter belief is not to address motives to the will, but arguments to the intellect. To do otherwise, to apply rewards and punishments to opinions, is as absurd as to raise men to the peerage for their ruddy complexions, to whip them for the gout, and hang them for the scrofula. The fatal consequences of regarding opinions as proper objects of penal laws, will claim our notice in the ensuing section. It will suffice at present to draw the conclusion, that all pain, mental or physical, inflicted with a view to punish a man for his opinions, is nothing less than useless and wanton cruelty, violating the plain dictate of nature, which forbids the production of evil in all cases where it is not consecrated by superior beneficial effects.

In contending that neither merit nor demerit can be imputed to any one for his opinions, it is almost unnecessary to say, we are not contending that it is of no importance what opinions he entertains. We are

advocating the innocence of the man, not the harmlessness of his views. Errors, as we shall have occasion to show in a subsequent essay, are by their nature injurious to society; and while he who really believes them ought to be regarded as perfectly free from culpability, every one who sees them in a different light is justified in endeavouring, by proper means, to lessen their influence; which is to be effected, not by the application of obloquy and punishment, but by addressing arguments to the understanding.

A distinction is also to be made between the state of the understanding and the manifestation of that state; or, in other words, between holding opinions and expressing them. While the former is independent of the will, and, therefore, free from moral culpability, the latter is always a voluntary act, and, being neutral in itself, may be commendable or reprehensible according to the circumstances in which it takes place. Whether it is a proper object of rewards and punishments will form hereafter a separate topic of consideration.

SECTION VIII.

ON THE EVIL CONSEQUENCES OF THE COMMON ERRORS ON THIS SUBJECT.

FEW speculative errors appear to have produced evil consequences so many and so extensive, as the notion that belief, doubt, and disbelief, are voluntary acts involving moral merit and demerit. One of its most obvious effects has been to draw mankind from an attention to moral conduct, and lead them to regard the belief of certain tenets as far more deserving of approbation than a course of the most consistent virtue. Where such a doctrine prevails, where opinions are considered of paramount importance to actions, it is no wonder if the ties of morality are loosened. The error under consideration has also produced much secret misery, by loading the minds of the timid and conscientious with the imaginary guilt of holding opinions which they regarded with

horror while they could not avoid them. What is still worse, it has frequently alarmed the inquirer into an abandonment of the pursuit of truth. Under a confused supposition of criminality in the belief of particular doctrines, men have with reason been deterred from examining evidence, lest it should irresistibly lead them to views which it might be culpable to entertain. If it is really true, indeed, that the least deviation from a given line of opinion will be attended with guilt, the only safe course is to exclude all examination, to shun every research which might, by possibility, terminate in any such result. When it is already fixed and determined, that an investigation must end in a prescribed way, otherwise the inquirer will be involved in criminality, all inquiry becomes not not only useless but foolish. This apprehension of the consequences of research once extended even to natural philosophy; and there is little doubt that it may be justly charged by moral science with much of the slowness of its progress. If the former has long since emancipated

itself from this error, the latter still confessedly labours under its oppression. The intellect is still intimidated into a desertion of every track which appears to lead to conclusions at variance with the prescribed modes of thinking.*

> " men grow pale
> Lest their own judgments should become too bright,
> And their free thoughts be crimes, and Earth have too much light†."

If it be objected to this representation, that those who regard belief as a voluntary act cannot consistently fear the result of examination on their own minds, since, according to their fundamental position, it will

* See Note B.

† Such are evidently not to be ranked amongst the disciples of Bacon, who says, " Let no man, upon a weak conceit of sobriety or an ill applied moderation, think or maintain, that a man can search too far, or be too well studied in the book of God's word, or in the book of God's works, divinity or philosophy; but, rather, let men endeavour an endless progress or proficience in both."—*Of the Proficience and Advancement of Learning*, book i.

always be in their power to think as they please; it may be a sufficient reply to say, that it is not intended to accuse them of reasoning consistently from the principles which they assume. The truth is, there has been the utmost confusion in this respect. Although men must, in all probability, have had a notion, however vague and obscure, that belief was dependant on the will, before they could have inferred it to be criminal, yet they have often retained the conclusion and dropped the premises. They have sometimes thought and acted as if opinions were voluntary and criminal, sometimes, as if they were at once criminal and involuntary. If the mistaken principle, that belief is governed by volition, had been rigorously pursued through all its consequences, it would have been immediately exploded. It is to the want of precise and consistent thinking on the subject that so many evil consequences are to be traced.

It is probable that the same error with regard to the nature of belief has been one principle cause of requiring subscriptions,

or other outward manifestations of assent, to a long list of abstruse, complex, and often unintelligible doctrines, in order to qualify the aspirant not only for ecclesiastical, but even for civil and military offices. On no other hypothesis, at least, could the practice be justified of making the profession of certain opinions the indispensable preliminary to personal exaltation, the stepping-stone to fortune and to power. Had not those who first devised this mode of obtaining unanimity had strong, although perhaps undefined impressions of the voluntary character of belief, they would, in all likelihood, have fallen upon the far more rational expedient of requiring, instead of a positive profession of faith, a pledge not to avow nor to inculcate any doctrines contrary to what were prescribed. This, though not free from numerous objections, would at least have been requiring what it was in every man's power to perform, while it would have presented no temptation to sacrifice, at the entrance of his career, his candour, or at all events his veracity.

Whether we acquiesce or not, however, in the supposition, that an impression of the voluntary nature of belief had a considerable share in the first institution of articles and subscriptions, it is plain that the practice could not have been consistently enforced under the general prevalence of the contrary doctrine.

There is one thing, indeed, which even then might have justified the enforcement of such a regulation, the improbability of any one subscribing a creed who could not conscientiously do it. On this point, let those decide who are aware of the causes which necessarily generate diversities of opinion, and who can, at the same time, estimate the chance which, in such an affair, the scruples of conscience have of maintaining their ground against the temptations of interest or the blandishments of power.

But the most fatal consequences of the speculative error under consideration are to be found in the repeated attempts to regulate men's creeds by the application of intimidation and punishment; in the intolerance

and persecution which have disgraced the history of the human race. The natural consequence of imputing guilt to opinions was an endeavour to prevent and to punish them; and, as such a course coincided with the gratification of the malignant passions of our nature, nothing less could be expected than that it would be pursued with eagerness and marked by cruelty.

It will probably be urged, that since a man's opinions are not to be read in his gestures or countenance, punishments cannot be applied till the opinions are expressed; and that when they have been inflicted, it has been done, not to alter his creed nor to punish him for holding it, but to prevent its propagation. If we look, however, into the history of mankind, we shall discover, that to prevent the propagation of opinions has not been the sole object of such penal inflictions. We shall find, that the aim of the persecutor has been, not only to prevent obnoxious opinions from spreading, but to punish the presumed guilt of holding them, and sometimes to convert the sufferers. He

has accordingly directed his fury against innocent actions, merely expressive or indicative of opinions, and having no tendency to propagate them, and has relented when his victims have been brought to profess a renunciation of their errors; his conduct evidently proceeding on the two assumptions, that belief was voluntary, so that a man might be induced or compelled to relinquish it; and, secondly, that if it differed from his own it was criminal, and therefore deserved to be punished.

The universal treatment of the Jews, from whom no contamination of faith could possibly be apprehended, is a standing proof of the prevalence and effects of these pernicious errors; and we need not go farther than the pages of our own history for additional instances and ample corroboration. "The persons condemned to these punishments," says Hume, in reference to the persecutions in the reign of the bloody and bigotted Mary, "were not convicted of teaching or dogmatising, contrary to the established religion; they were seized merely on suspicion, and articles

being offered them to subscribe, they were immediately upon their refusal condemned to the flames."

These persecutors, it is plain (unless they were actuated solely by the vilest motives), must either have thought it possible to eradicate opinions from the mind by violence, and force others upon it, or have laboured under the strange infatuation of conceiving, that they could render God and man service by destroying the sincerity of their fellow-creatures, and compelling them to make professions at variance with their real conviction. Perhaps, sometimes one and sometimes the other of these notions actuated the minds of the bigots. Sometimes they might think, that if a poor wretch could be forced by intimidation or torture to acknowledge the truth of a creed, he would really believe it; and sometimes, that it was a valuable triumph to extort a few words from the weakness of nature, how contrary soever they might be to the real sentiments of their victims. It is probable, however, that their minds were never entirely free from con-

fused notions of the voluntary nature of belief, of the consequent possibility of altering opinions by the application of motives, and of the criminality of holding any creed but their own. These principles seem to have actuated more or less all religious persecutors. Even the victims themselves appear, in many instances, not to have called in question the right of persecution, but only the propriety of its exercise on their own persons. Both the persecutors and the persecuted have united in maintaining that the holders of wrong opinions deserved the vengeance of the community, and differed only as to the objects on whom it ought to fall. In reading the history of intolerance, our pity for the sufferers is often neutralized by a detestation of their principles, by a knowledge that they would have inflicted equal torture on their adversaries, had they had equal power; and all that is left for us to do, is to mourn over the degradation of our common nature. Thus we find many of the reformers in England, Switzerland, and Germany, as unsparing in their persecution of

those who departed from their tenets as the most bigotted adherents to the ancient religion. Of this a striking and memorable instance is furnished by our own annals in the case of a Dr. Barnes. This man, who had himself renounced the established doctrine regarding transubstantiation, was exasperated that another person, of the name of Lambert, had taken a different ground in his dissent from it.

"By the present laws and practice," says Hume, "Barnes was no less exposed to the stake than Lambert; yet such was the persecuting rage which prevailed, that he was determined to bring this man to condign punishment; because, in their common departure from the ancient faith, he had dared to go one step farther than himself." It is almost needless to add, that this wretched bigot succeeded in his object; and the reader of his history, in the first warmth of indignation, hardly regrets that he met with a persecutor in his turn and perished at the stake.

We find even Cranmer, the mild, the mo-

derate, the amiable, the beneficent, (it is thus he is represented by historians), we find even such a character consigning a poor female to the flames because her opinions were not quite orthodox. Nor is it to be forgotten, that the gentle and dispassionate Melancthon expressed his decided approbation of the burning of Servetus, and his wonder that any body could be found to condemn it. Nothing can more strikingly show the pernicious influence of this single error.

But although it is scarcely to be conceived, that intolerance and persecution would have been carried to such an excess, had it not been for the fundamental error here noticed, it is not to be denied that many other causes have mingled their influence; and it will not be altogether foreign to the tenor of this essay to bestow upon them a passing notice. There seems to be a principle inherent in the nature of man, that leads him to seek for the approbation of his fellow-creatures, not only in his actions, but in his modes of thinking.

He covets the concurrence of others, and is uneasy under dissent and disagreement. Objections to his opinions seem to place a disagreeable impediment in the way of his imagination; they disturb his self-complacency, and render him restless and uneasy. This, of itself, is sufficient to make him regard with displeasure and resentment all those who are of a different opinion from his own. Men, even of the best regulated minds and mildest dispositions, find it difficult to argue with uniform coolness and temper. A debate, from a contest of arguments often becomes a contest of passions. We resent, not only the opposition to our doctrines but the presumption of the opponent, and grow eager to chastise it. Love of truth, if we originally had it, is soon lost in the desire of avenging our mortified vanity; and the rancour of our feelings being exasperated by every detection of the weakness of our arguments, recourse is had to violence to overwhelm those whom we cannot confute.

As we partly seek for the concurrence of

others on account of the corroboration which it affords of the truth of our own sentiments, it is observable, that those men in general are the least hurt at opposition, who, having a clear discernment of the foundation of their tenets, least require the support of other people's approbation; and that the prejudiced and the ignorant, men of narrow views and confused notions, always display the most inveterate intolerance. "While men," to borrow the words of the classical historian already quoted, "zealously maintain what they neither clearly comprehend, nor entirely believe, they are shaken in their imagined faith by the opposite persuasion, or even doubts of other men; and vent on their antagonists that impatience, which is the natural result of so disagreeable a state of the understanding."* The state of doubt is, in-

* It is a curious fact, which, I think, may be observed in the history of persecution, that men are generally more inclined to punish those who believe less than they themselves do, than those who believe more. We pity rather than condemn the extravagancies of fanaticism, and the absurdities of superstí-

deed, a state of trouble, to which every one will be averse in proportion as he is unaccustomed to intellectual exertion and candid inquiry. Hence, whoever takes his opinions on trust, has a thorough repugnance to be disturbed by contrary arguments. This, as Berkeley remarks, is observable even in the literary world. "Two sorts of learned men there are," says he: "one, who candidly seek truth by rational means. These are never averse to have their principles looked into, and examined by the test of reason. Another sort there is, who learn by *rote* a set of principles and a way of thinking which happen to be in vogue. These betray them-

tion; but are apt to grow angry at the speculations of scepticism. If any one superadds something to the established creed, his conduct is viewed with tolerable composure; it is when he attempts to subtract from it, that he provokes indignation. Is it that we feel a sort of superiority at perceiving the absurdity of what others believe, and, on the other hand, are mortified when any body else appears to arrogate the same superiority over ourselves?†

† See Note C.

selves by their anger and surprise, whenever their principles are freely canvassed.*"

But the mortification arising from controversy, and the uneasiness of doubt, are comparatively transient and irregular motives of persecution. We may find more fixed and steady sources of intolerance in the connection often subsisting between men's permanent interests, or favourite objects, and the maintenance of certain doctrines. Those persons are peculiarly rancorous against dissent and opposition, who have assumed an opinion, probably without comprehending it, and without the least concern about its truth, from selfish and mercenary views. When the emolument, power, pride, personal consequence, or gratification of any one becomes identified with a doctrine or system, he is impatient and resentful at the slightest doubt; because every doubt is of the nature of a personal attack, and threatens danger to the objects of his regard. It is this identification of personal interests with systems of opinions, which has in all ages

* A Defence of Free Thinking in Mathematics.

been one of the greatest sources of intolerance on the part of the priesthood. It is this, which has led them to represent, with so much zeal, a departure from their dogmas as one of the worst of crimes, and often caused them to pursue with remorseless cruelty all aberrations from that creed on which their power and importance depended.

It becomes an interesting inquiry, how far these causes of intolerance continue in action in the present day, and in our own country. In the first place, with regard to such as are discoverable in the passions of mankind, we can only look for a mitigation in so far as those passions are weakened, or placed under stricter control. Men are still inflamed with resentment and opposition, and are ready to defend, by other than intellectual means, the doctrines with which their interest, power, and importance are indissolubly interwoven. But besides that the spirits of all such are probably softened by the improvement of the age (for it is the tendency of civilization to mitigate the iras-

cible passions), they are no longer permitted by the moral sympathies of mankind to manifest their resentment and mortification by the same violent methods. Reproach and invective must now, in most cases, content that selfish bigotry, which, in a former age, would have had recourse to more formidable weapons.

In the second place, if the practices of the world receive any amelioration from its advancement in knowledge, if the one keep pace with the other, we may rationally expect to see a diminution of intolerance, in so far as it is founded in ignorance and error. Society, accordingly no longer presents us with the same outrageous scenes of persecution, and mad attempts on men's understandings. We no longer witness the same compulsory methods of obtaining subscriptions to creeds, nor do we even hear the same violent denunciations against heresy and dissent. The fundamental error, of imputing guilt to a man on account of his opinions, has shrunk within narrower bounds; but it is nevertheless far from being exter-

minated. Men have extended their sphere of liberality, they have expanded their system of toleration, but it is not yet without limits. There is still a boundary in speculation, beyond which no one is allowed to proceed; at which innocence terminates and guilt commences; a boundary not fixed and determinate, but varying with the creed of every party.

Although the advanced civilization of the age rejects the palpably absurd application of torture and death, it is not to be concealed, that, amongst a numerous class, there is an analogous, though less barbarous persecution, of all who depart from received doctrines—the persecution of private antipathy and public odium. They are looked upon as a species of criminals, and their deviations from established opinions, or, if any one prefers the phrase, their speculative errors, are regarded by many with as much horror as flagrant violations of morality. In the ordinary ranks of men, where exploded prejudices often linger for ages, this is scarcely to be wondered at; but it is pain-

ful, and on a first view unaccountable, to witness the prevalence of the same spirit in the republic of letters; to see mistakes in speculation pursued with all the warmth of moral indignation and reproach. He who believes an opinion on the authority of others, who has taken no pains to investigate its claims to credibility, nor weighed the objections to the evidence on which it rests, is lauded for his acquiescence, while obloquy from every side is too often heaped on the man, who has minutely searched into the subject, and been led to an opposite conclusion. There are few things more disgusting to an enlightened mind than to see a number of men, a mob, whether learned or illiterate, who have never scrutinized the foundation of their opinions, assailing with contumely an individual, who, after the labour of research and reflection, has adopted different sentiments from theirs, and pluming themselves on the notion of superior virtue, because their understandings have been tenacious of prejudice.*

* See Note D.

This conduct is the more remarkable, as on every side we meet with the admission, that belief is not dependant on the will; and yet the same men, by whom this admission is readily made, will argue and inveigh on the virtual assumption of the contrary.

This is a striking proof, amongst a multitude of others, of what the thinking mind must have frequently observed, that a principle is often retained in its applications, long after it had been discarded as an abstract proposition. In a subject of so much importance, however, it behoves intelligent men to be rigidly consistent. If our opinions are not voluntary, but independent of the will, the contrary doctrine and all its consequences ought to be practically abandoned; they ought to be weeded from the sentiments, habits, and institutions of society. We may venture to assert, that neither the virtue nor the happiness of man will ever be placed on a perfectly firm basis, till this fundamental error has been extirpated from the human mind.

ESSAY

ON THE

PUBLICATION OF OPINIONS.

ESSAY II.

ON THE

PUBLICATION OF OPINIONS.

SECTION I.

INTRODUCTION.

It has been shown in the preceding essay, that belief is an involuntary act or state of the understanding, which cannot be affected by rewards and punishments; and that, consequently, opinions are not the proper subjects of legislation. The publication of opinions, however, being a voluntary act, the propriety or impropriety of interfering with it must be determined by other principles. The advocates of restraints on the freedom of public discussion, renouncing the criminality of opinions as a ground of legislative

enactments, may be conceived as urging the following arguments.

"The formation of opinions may not depend on the will; but the communication of them being voluntary, it is surely wise to prevent the dissemination of such as have an injurious tendency, which can be effected only by attaching a punishment to it. In the same way that we are justified in restraining the liberty of a man who arrives from a country infected with the plague, by making him perform quarantine; we are justified in restraining the liberty of every man who entertains opinions of an evil tendency, by requiring him to keep them to himself. And, as in the former case, it is necessary to punish him who breaks through so salutary a restraint, so it is in the latter. This is all for which we contend. In either case there may be no criminality attaching to the individual, on account of his body or his mind being the seat of a noxious principle; but the community has a right to impose upon him whatever regulations are necessary to prevent its diffusion, and to inflict a penalty

on the transgression of regulations so imposed."

That the general principle involved in this reasoning is correct there can be no doubt. A society has a perfect right to adopt such regulations, for its own government, as have a preponderance of advantages. Utility, therefore, in the most comprehensive acceptation of the term, is the test by which every institution, every law, and every course of action must be tried. Restrictions of any kind must be acknowledged to be proper, if, taking in the whole of their consequences, they can be proved to be beneficial to the community, although they may be directed against actions involving no moral turpitude. The only point is to establish their beneficial tendency. The laws of quarantine furnish a good illustration of the general principle, but do not form a case at all analogous to that of restrictions on the publication of opinions. To render the cases parallel it would be necessary to suppose the phenomena of the human constitution to be different from what they are; that health was

of a communicable nature, and could be imported into a country as well as disease, and that no regulations could be devised to admit the one without the other.

In this case, if the people were already afflicted with various disorders, and if it could be proved that the salubrious would on the whole preponderate over the noxious contagion, it is evident, that any restraints imposed with a view to prevent the importation of disease, would debar the nation from a positive accession to their stock of health.

It is a similar effect to this, which, we shall endeavour to show, would ensue from restraints on the publication of opinions. Truth and error, in the one case, are as much intermixed, and as inseparable by human regulations, as health and disease would be in the other; they can only be admitted and excluded together; and, of the two, there are the strongest grounds for believing that the former must greatly prevail and finally triumph. Restrictions, therefore, on the publication of any opinions,

would retard the advancement and dissemination of truth as much as any precautionary laws, under the circumstances supposed, would impede the propagation of health. These views it will be the aim of the following pages to illustrate. But as it may be questioned whether the happiness of mankind is promoted by truth and injured by error, a position on which the whole argument depends, it will be necessary to offer a few preliminary considerations in support of that important doctrine. After endeavouring to establish the conclusion, that the attainment of truth ought to be the sole object of all regulations affecting the publication of opinions, because error is injurious; we shall proceed to show, that the extrication of mankind from error will be most readily and effectually accomplished by perfect freedom of discussion; that to check inquiry and attempt to regulate the progress and direction of opinions, by proscriptions and penalties, is to disturb the order of nature, and is analogous, in its mis-

chievous tendency, to the system of forcing the capital and industry of the community into channels, which they would never spontaneously seek, instead of suffering private interest to direct them to their most profitable employment.

SECTION II.

ON THE MISCHIEFS OF ERROR AND THE ADVANTAGES OF TRUTH.

Our inquiry into the mischiefs of error and the advantages of truth may be simplified by laying aside the sciences which have a reference to the material world; as no one will be found to doubt, that mistakes in physical knowledge must be injurious, and their overthrow beneficial. Or supposing that errors in these sciences may exist, without affecting the happiness of man, it is unquestionable that the detection of such errors must also be harmless; and it will scarcely be contested, that the utility of these departments of knowledge must consist in the truth of their principles and the justness of their application.

We may, therefore, limit our inquiry to the effects of truth in those sciences which treat of the powers, conduct, character, and

condition of intelligent beings. The ultimate problem to be solved in all these sciences is, what is most conducive to the real happiness of mankind. Amidst the innumerable questions in theology, metaphysics, morals, and politics, it may not always be easy to discern, that to solve this problem is their final and their only rational aim: but it is, in reality, on the success with which they point out the true path of happiness, that their whole value depends, beyond what they possess as an exercise for the faculties, in common with a game at chess or a scholastic disputation, and what belongs to them as sources of sublime and pleasurable emotion, in common with the fictions of the poet and the painter. What is theology, but a comprehensive examination into the course of action and condition of mind, which will please the Being who has the fate of mankind in his hands? What is metaphysics, but an inquiry into the nature of man, the extent of his faculties, his relations to the existences around him, and the bearing of all these on his condi-

tion? What is the science of morals, but an endeavour to find out what conduct will ultimately tend to his felicity? And what is that of politics, but a similar attempt to discover what public measures will promote the same end?

If the object of all these sciences is to inquire, what is most conducive to the happiness of mankind, and if their value is proportioned to the success of that inquiry, error must of course be pernicious, or, on the most favourable supposition, useless. This proposition is, indeed, implied in the terms used. That we should be benefited by mistakes relative to the means of obtaining happiness, is as palpable an absurdity as can be conceived.

In these moral inquiries, then, the nearer mankind approach to truth, the happier they will be, the better will they be able to avoid what is injurious, and adopt measures of positive utility. All errors must be deviations from the path of real good; and whether they tend to give man too high or too low an opinion of his nature and destiny, to fill

his mind with fancied relations which do not exist, or destroy his belief in those which are in being; whether they give him mistaken ideas of moral obligation, or impose a wrong standard of moral conduct; whether they mislead him in his social or in his political measures, they are alike detrimental, although they may differ in the degree of their mischievous tendency. In a word, whatever is the real condition, nature, and destination of man, it is important for him to know the truth, that his conduct may be regulated accordingly, that his efforts after happiness may be properly directed, that he may be the sport of neither delusive hopes nor groundless fears, that he may not sink under remediable evils, nor lose attainable good.

To argue that truth is not beneficial is to contend, that it is useless to know the direct road to the place which is the object of our journey; to affirm, that error is not injurious, is to advocate the harmlessness or the advantages of wandering in ignorance and being led astray by deception.*

* See Note E.

There are errors, it is true, which may be allowed to produce accidental benefit, and others, which, by supplying in some degree the place of truths, may be the source of partial good, and the subversion of which may be attended with temporary evil. The discovery of truth may occasionally resemble in its effects the invention of mechanical improvements, which, on their first introduction, sometimes beget injury to individuals, and even transitory inconvenience to society. But partial and transitory evil can be no solid objection to the introduction of general and permanent good. There is not the semblance of a reason, why the welfare of the community at large should be sacrificed to the advantage of a few; or why a small and transient injury should not be endured for the sake of a great and lasting benefit. If errors are ever useful they are less useful than truth, and are therefore absolute evils.*

* En effet le caractere distinctif de la vérité est d'être également et constamment avantageuse à tous les partis, tandis que le mensonge, utile pour quelques instans seulement à quelques individus, est toujours

"Utility and truth are not to be divided," says Bishop Berkeley, "the general good of mankind being the rule or measure of moral truth."*

With regard to the collateral advantages of the various branches of knowledge, consisting in the improvement of the faculties, and the pleasure which they immediately impart, irrespective of their ulterior usefulness, it will scarcely be necessary to prove, that truth cannot be inimical to either. It will be admitted, at least, that the efficiency of any science in improving the powers of the mind can borrow nothing from its incorrectness; and we may, therefore, pass on to the second collateral advantage, and inquire whether error can be superior to truth as a source of immediate gratification.

Plausible and erroneous theories may be admitted, in some cases, to impart a pleasure to the mind, while they impose themselves

nuisible à tous les autres."—*Du Marsais on Prejudice, as quoted in the Retrospective Review,* page 75.

* A Discourse addressed to Magistrates and Men in Authority.

upon it as true, equal to that which can be derived from the most accurate speculations; but if they sometimes confer an equal they cannot in general be supposed to confer a superior pleasure. If we allow that the hypothesis of Descartes imparted ideas and emotions to the astronomer of those days nowise inferior in point of interest and sublimity to those excited, at a later period, by the discoveries of Newton, it is the utmost limit of supposition, and we have not the shadow of a reason for giving the superiority to the former. On the contrary, unless we choose to suppose, that the chimeras of man's imagination are better calculated to excite pleasure and admiration than the real order and constitution of nature, we must admit, that every discovery of her laws, every detection of error, and every advance in true knowledge, must have a tendency to exalt our sources of enjoyment. In the physical sciences, at least, we may take it for granted, that error cannot bring a real increase of pleasure; but in religion, morals,

metaphysics, and politics, may not there be pleasant delusions; falsehoods, which delight while they do no harm; dreams, the scene of which is placed beyond the reach of earthly changes, and which, as they are not assailable by time, may be cherished without the risk of being destroyed, and without any possible train of pernicious consequences; and may not these delusions bestow consolation and happiness superior to the cold realities of truth? May not the benevolent mind derive more gratification from extravagant expectations of the extinction of vice and misery, and the perfectibility of man, than from juster views of the constitution of human nature? And may not the enthusiast extract from his dreams of beatitude more real enjoyment, a greater sum of pleasurable emotion, than the rigid reasoner from more probable anticipations? Since the human mind is so constituted as to be capable of connecting its happiness with almost any opinions, a man may certainly derive considerable pleasure from such delu-

sions as these, and suffer pain from their destruction ;* yet it may be doubted whether, in general, juster speculations would not have afforded equal, and even superior gratification, had he originally formed them. But granting the contrary, in its utmost extent, it could happen only in the case of a few individuals. Men are so engaged with

* On this point every one will agree with Lord Bacon : " Doth any man doubt," he asks, " that if there were taken out of men's minds vain opinions, flattering hopes, false valuations, imaginations as one would, and the like, but it would leave the minds of a number of men poor, shrunken things, full of melancholy and indisposition, and unpleasing to themselves ?"—*Essay on Truth.* His lordship, however, although he thus strongly pourtrays the disagreeable effects which would follow the destruction of these " baseless fabrics," is not to be considered as contending that they are a positive good, for in another passage he expressly marks their evil tendency. " How many things are there," he exclaims, " which we imagine not ! How many things do we esteem and value otherwise than they are ! This ill-proportioned estimation, these vain imaginations, these be the clouds of error that turn into the storms of perturbation." — *In Praise of Knowledge.*

the objects immediately around them, that mere visionary notions of this sort could never be a common and abundant source of enjoyment; or, at least, could never possess any superiority in that character over sober and rational views; and if they were formed on insufficient grounds, as by the supposition they must be, that insufficiency would be liable occasionally to appear and throw the mind into doubt. So that, regarded even in this aspect, truth is the only sure and stable basis of happiness. But all the direct pleasure, which such delusions, how flattering soever to the imagination, could afford, would be no compensation for the ultimate evils attendant upon them. None of the dreams of enthusiasm are destitute of some bearing on practice. However remote they may appear from the present scene, and from the conduct of life, inferences will not fail to be drawn and applied from one to the other. These sanguine creations, and celestial visions, will be linked to the business of the world in the same way that the motions of the heavenly bodies, which were at first

matters of mere curiosity to a few shepherds, were soon connected by the imaginations of men with human affairs, and rendered subservient to gross and wretched superstitions. The influence of delusions will be always detrimental to happiness, inasmuch as they have a tendency to withdraw men's attention from those subjects in which their welfare is really implicated, and lead to eccentric modes of action, incompatible with the regular and beneficial course of duty and discretion. They are liable, too, to be exalted into sacred articles of faith, and to swell into an imaginary importance, which rouses all the energy of the passions in their support. It is thus that discord and dissension, intolerance and persecution, have sometimes been the bitter fruits of what was, at first, an apparently harmless and improbable dream. Nor is it to be forgotten, that delusions of this kind could never prevail without some weakness of understanding or imperfection of knowledge, incompatible with a thorough insight into the means of happiness, and therefore inconsistent with the highest state

of felicity. A belief in them would necessarily involve logical errors, the consequences of which could not be confined to a single subject, but would extend themselves to others, where they might be highly injurious. The same fallacious principles, which deluded mankind on one occasion, with perhaps little detriment, would carry them from the direct path of their real interest, in affairs where such aberrations might be of vital importance.

SECTION III.

CONTINUATION OF THE SAME SUBJECT.

A DOUBT may, perhaps, be raised, whether the conclusions, which we have attempted to establish, as to the advantages of truth, are corroborated by the actual state of facts and the experience of mankind; whether error has, in reality, been found replete with such evils as theoretical deductions lead us to suppose.

Reasoning on the passions and principles of the human mind, perceiving its power of accommodation to circumstances, and how much man's real felicity depends on his peculiar temper and conduct, as well as on other causes which spring up and expire with himself; comparing various ages and nations, under different laws, customs, and religious institutions, and seeing in all the same round of business and pleasure,

the same passions, the same hilarity in youth and sobriety in manhood, the same ardour of love between the sexes, the same attachment among friends, the same pursuit of wealth, power, and reputation, the same dissensions, the same crimes, and the same scenes of affliction, disease, and death; the philosopher may be induced to conclude, that, amidst the operation of so many principles, the state of opinions can have but a feeble influence on the happiness of private life. He may be ready to exclaim with the poet,

"How small, of all that human hearts endure,
That part which laws or kings can cause or cure!"*

And, extending the remark to moral science, conclude, that beyond the circle of common knowledge, which is forced on every mind, truth and error can be of importance only to speculative men; that it is of little moment what opinions prevail, while the results, on a comprehensive estimate, are so nearly similar and equal.

* Goldsmith.

But, if he reason thus, he will overlook a thousand points at which the state of moral, theological, and political opinions touches on public welfare and private happiness. Knowledge of truth is essential to correctness of practice; and this is true, not only of individuals, but of communities. The prevalence of error may, therefore, be expected to manifest itself in absurd and pernicious practices and institutions; and we have only to look into the history of superstition and barbarism, to see its effects on the happiness of private life. Although that happiness may essentially depend on the qualities of individuals and their peculiar circumstances, is it of no importance that it should be secured from the violent interference of others? that even the chances of evil should be lessened? Is it no advantage to be free from the gloomy fears of superstition, to be absolved from the burden of fanatical rites, from absurd and mischievous institutions, from oppressive laws, and from a state of society in which unmeaning ceremonies are substituted for the duties of

virtue? Are unrestrained liberty of innocent action, and security of property and existence, worthless? Is it nothing to be removed from the risk of the dungeon and the stake, for the conscientious profession of opinions; to be rid of the alternative of the scaffold on the one hand, and, on the other, the sacrifice of conscience and honour?

These are all causes by which the train of events constituting a man's life is evidently liable to be modified. They have a material share in shaping the circumstances of the individual, and even enter largely into the formation of his character; so that even those features of his condition, which appear the most remote from such an influence, often derive their complexion from it. And what is it, that has extirpated these barbarities and produced these benefits but the progress of truth, the discovery of the real nature and tendencies of such practices and institutions? Let him that is sceptical as to the vast importance of truth, cast his eye down the long catalogue of crimes and cruelties which stain the annals of the past,

and examine the melioration which has taken place in the practices of the world, and he will not again inquire into the nature of those advantages which follow the destruction of error. All the liberality of thinking which now prevails, the spirit of resistance to tyranny, the contempt of priestcraft, the comparative rarity and mildness of religious persecution, the mitigation of national prejudices, the disappearance of a number of mischievous superstitions, the abolition of superfluous, absurd, and sanguinary laws, are so many exemplifications of the benefits resulting from the progress of moral and political truth. They are triumphs, all of them, over established error, and imply respectively, either the removal of a source of misery, or a positive addition to the sources of happiness. It is impossible for a moment to imagine, that if moral and political science had been thoroughly understood, the barbarities here noticed would have existed. A pernicious custom or an absurd law can never long prevail amidst a complete and universal appreciation of its character.

The science of political economy, that noble creation of modern times, throws the strongest lights on the extent to which the welfare of mankind may be affected by fallacious prejudices and false conclusions in national policy. To pass over the evils of restrictions on the commercial intercourse of nations, from blind jealousy and absurd rivalship, the barriers everywhere opposed to the free exercise of industry, and the shackles by which enterprise has universally been crippled; we have only to appeal to the principles on which governments have regulated the circulating medium of their respective countries (more especially our own) to show the vast influence, which an apparently slight mistake may possess on the transactions and the condition of millions of the human race.

In the science of morals, the operation of a wrong speculative principle on society cannot, perhaps, be more strongly exemplified, than in the consequences of the particular error which formed a principal topic of the preceding essay. The most cursory

glance at the history of persecution is sufficient to discover, that intolerance never could have existed in such intensity had it not been for the almost universal prevalence of the notion, that guilt might be incurred by opinions. In various ages and countries, deviations from the received faith have been looked upon, by the community at large, with more abhorrence than the most criminal actions; and the consequence of this has been the perpetration of cruelties at which modern civilization shudders with horror. Let those, who contend that speculative error can have but little influence on the happiness of private life, reflect a moment on the numbers of innocent and conscientious victims who have been destroyed by the Inquisition. It cannot surely be supposed, that these persecutions would ever have taken place, had the people at large been clearly convinced of the truth, that belief is an involuntary and therefore a guiltless state of the mind; or, in other words, had they not laboured under the delusion, that opinions are the proper objects

of punishment. Persecution would be necessarily exterminated in any nation which universally felt its injustice and absurdity. The moral sympathies of mankind, which had been perverted by false notions, would resume their natural direction, and would never suffer punishment to fall upon those, who, in the apprehension of all, had been guilty of no crime. What else but the general prevalence of the error already mentioned, could have induced men, otherwise uninterested, to witness with tameness, nay even with satisfaction and delight, the most detestable barbarities inflicted by religious zeal? We are told, that in Spain and Portugal the spectators, who crowded to the executions for heresy, frequently testified extravagant joy. Even ladies would laugh and exult over the victims who were slowly consuming at the stake. In reviewing such scenes, we are pained to think how awfully mankind may be deluded, how their sagacity may be blinded, their sense of justice extinguished, their best feelings subverted, by fallacies of judgment; and we become

ready to question, whether even vice itself ever produced half the evils of false notions and mistaken views.

"The observer must be blind indeed," says an elegant author and enlightened philosopher, "who does not perceive the vastness of the scale on which speculative principles, both right and wrong, have operated upon the present condition of mankind; or who does not now feel and acknowledge how deeply the morals and the happiness of private life, as well as the order of political society, are involved in the final issue of the contest between true and false philosophy."*

* Dugald Stewart's Philosophical Essays, page 67.

SECTION IV.

ON FREEDOM OF DISCUSSION AS THE MEANS OF ATTAINING TRUTH.

THE considerations offered in the preceding section are sufficient to show the extreme importance of just principles, and that mankind can never err in their speculative views without endangering their real welfare. It follows, as a necessary consequence, that the sole end of enquiry ought to be, not the support of any particular doctrines, but the attainment of truth, whatever may be the result to established systems. If, indeed, we admit the perniciousness of error, it is impossible to maintain any other object with even the appearance of reason. It is the sacred principle from which we ought never to swerve.* The inquiry, how truth is to be

* The reader will find some excellent remarks on the subject of this section in Paley's Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy. See the chapter on Toleration.

attained, becomes, therefore, in the highest degree interesting and important.

Nothing more, it is manifest, would be required for the destruction of error than some fixed and invariable standard of truth, which could be at once appealed to and be decisive of every controversy to the satisfaction of all mankind; but that no such standard exists, the slightest consideration will be sufficient to evince. If it be asserted, that on points of religion the sacred writings are such a standard, it may be urged in reply, that this is only an apparent exception; for, in the first place, we have no standard by which the authenticity of those writings can be determined beyond all liability to dispute; and, in the second place, supposing we had a test of this nature, or that the authenticity of the Scriptures was too evident to admit of the least doubt from the most perverse understanding, yet we have no decisive standard of interpretation.

Neither can we discover a standard of truth in the opinions of the majority of mankind, otherwise we might ascertain all

truth by the simple process of counting votes. The majority of mankind are seldom free from error; they have often held opinions the most absurd, and at different times have entertained contradictory propositions.

It would be equally vain to look for a standard of truth in the judgment of any particular class of human beings. No rank, no office, no privileges, no attainments in wisdom or science, can be a security from error. Bodies of men, who have assumed infallibility, have, hitherto, always been mistaken.

Since, then, we have no fixed standard by which we can in all cases try the validity of opinions, as we can measure time and space; since we have no oracles of indisputable authenticity, or at least of incontrovertible meaning; since we cannot ascertain truth by putting opinions to the vote, nor by an appeal to any class or order of men, how are we to attain it, or by what means escape from error?

Although we have no absolute test of

truth, yet we have faculties to discern it, and it is only by the unrestrained exercise of those faculties that we can hope to attain correct opinions. Our success in every subject will essentially depend on the completeness of the examination. But no individual mind is so acute and comprehensive, so free from passion and prejudice, and placed in such favourable circumstances, as in any complex question to see all the possible arguments on both sides in their full force. Hence the co-operation of various minds becomes indispensably requisite. The greater the number of inquirers, the greater the probability of a successful result. Some will come to the inquiry under circumstances peculiarly favourable to success, some with faculties capable of penetrating where less acute ones fail, and some disengaged from passions and prejudices with which others are encumbered. While one directs his scrutiny to a particular view of the subject, another will regard it in a different aspect, a third will see it from a position inaccessible to his predecessors; and, by the

comparison and collision of opinions, truth will be separated from error and emerge from obscurity. If attainable by human faculties, it must by such a process be ultimately evolved.

The way, then, to obtain this result is to permit all to be said on a subject that can be said. All error is the consequence of narrow and partial views, and can be removed only by having a question presented in all its possible bearings, or, in other words, by unlimited discussion. Where there is perfect freedom of examination, there is the greatest probability which it is possible to have that the truth will be ultimately attained. To impose the least restraint is to diminish this probability. It is to declare that we will not take into consideration all the possible arguments which can be presented, but that we will form our opinions on partial views. It is, therefore, to increase the probability of error. Nor need we, under the utmost freedom of discussion, be in any fear of an inundation of crude and preposterous speculations. All

such will meet with a proper and effectual check in the neglect or ridicule of the public: none will have much influence but those which possess the plausibility bestowed by a considerable admixture of truth, and which it is of importance should appear, that, amidst the contention of controversy, what is true may be separated from what is false.*

The objection, that the plan of unlimited discussion would introduce a multiplicity of erroneous speculations, is in reality directed against the very means of attaining the end. Though error is an absolute evil, it is frequently necessary to go through it to arrive at truth; as a man, to ascertain the nearest road from one place to another, may be obliged to make frequent deviations from the direct line. In the physical sciences, through how many errors has the path to truth frequently lain! What would have been the present state of knowledge, if no step had been hazarded without a perfect assurance of being right? Even the ideal theory of Berkeley and the scepticism of

* See Note F.

Hume have had their use in establishing human science on its just foundation.* We are midway in the stream of ignorance and error; and it is a poor argument against an attempt to reach the shore, that every step will be a plunge into the very element from which we are anxious to escape. Mankind, it is obvious, are not endowed with faculties to possess themselves at once of correct opinions on all subjects. On many questions they must expend painful and persevering efforts; they must often be mistaken, and often be set right, before they completely succeed. To stop them at any point in their career, to erect a barrier, and say, thus far your inquiries have proceeded, but here they must terminate, can scarcely fail to fix them in the midst of some error. It is prejudging all future efforts and all future opportunities of discovery, without a knowledge of their nature and extent. It is proclaiming, that whatever events may hereafter take place, whatever new principles may be evolved, whatever established fallacies may

* See Note G.

be exploded, how much soever the methods of investigating truth may be enlarged and enhanced in efficacy, and how gigantic soever may be the progress of the human mind in other departments of knowledge; yet no application of any of these improvements and discoveries shall be made to certain particular subjects, which shall be as fixed spots, immoveable stations, amidst all the vicissitudes and advancement of science.

SECTION V.

ON THE ASSUMPTIONS INVOLVED IN ALL RESTRAINTS ON THE PUBLICATION OF OPINIONS.

THE arguments adduced in the last section have brought us to the conclusion, that unrestrained freedom of inquiry is the only, or at least the best and readiest way of arriving at correct opinions. It may deserve a little attention, in the next place, to investigate the grounds on which all restrictions, if they are honestly intended for the benefit of the community, must proceed. They must evidently be founded, either on the position that the prevalence of truth would be productive of pernicious consequences, or admitting its good consequences, on the positions, first, that truth has been attained, and secondly, that, having been attained, it stands in need of the protection and assistance of power in its contest with error.

That the prevalence of truth would contribute to the happiness of man has already been enforced at some length; and in showing that there is no fixed standard or positive test of truth, we have, perhaps, sufficiently exposed the presumption of assuming, that truth has been infallibly attained. Nothing, in fact, could justify such an assumption but the possession of faculties not liable to mistake, or such palpable evidence on a subject as would render all restraints perfectly superfluous and absurd. The most thorough conviction of the truth of any opinions is far from being a proof of their correctness, or the slightest justification of any attempt at the forcible suppression of contrary sentiments. Had our predecessors, who were equally convinced of the truth of their tenets, succeeded in stifling investigation, the world would have been still immersed in the darkness of superstition, and bound as fast as ever by the fetters of prejudice. They felt themselves, nevertheless, as firmly in the right as the present age can possibly feel, and were equally justified in

acts of intolerance and persecution. Amidst the overwhelming proof afforded by the annals of the past, that mankind are continually liable to be deceived in their strongest convictions, it is a preposterous and unpardonable presumption, in any man, to set up the firmness of his own belief as an absolute criterion of truth.*

Every one must, of course, think his own opinions right; for if he thought them wrong, they would no longer be his opinions: but there is a wide difference between regarding ourselves as infallible, and being firmly convinced of the truth of our creed. When a man reflects on any particular doctrine, he may be impressed with a thorough conviction of the improbability or even impossibility of its being false: and so he may feel with regard to all his other opinions, when he makes them objects of separate contemplation. And yet, when he views them in the aggregate, when he reflects, that not a single being on the earth holds collectively the same, when he looks at the past history

* See Note H.

and present state of mankind, and observes the various creeds of different ages and nations, the peculiar modes of thinking of sects, and bodies, and individuals, the notions once firmly held, which have been exploded, the prejudices once universally prevalent, which have been removed, and the endless controversies, which have distracted those who have made it the business of their lives to arrive at the truth; and when he further dwells on the consideration, that many of these his fellow creatures have had a conviction of the justness of their respective sentiments equal to his own, he cannot help the obvious inference, that in his own opinions it is next to impossible that there is not an admixture of error; that there is an infinitely greater probability of his being wrong in some than right in all.

Every man of common sense and common candour, although he may have no suspicion where his mistakes lie, must have this general suspicion of his own fallibility; and, if he act consistently, he will not seek to suppress opinions by force, because in so doing

he might be at once lending support to error, and destroying the only means of its detection. In endeavouring to spread his opinions, and to suppress all others by the arm of power, the utmost success would have no tendency to lay open the least of those mistakes which had insinuated themselves into his creed; but in propagating his opinions by arguments, by appeals to the discrimination of his fellow-men, he would be contributing alike to the detection of his own errors and to the overthrow of those of his antagonists.

It remains to consider, in the next place, the assumption, implied in all restrictions on inquiry, that truth, in its contest with error, stands in need of the protection of human authority.

Men have long since found out how ridiculous is the interference of authority in physical and mathematical science; when will they learn to smile at its officious and impotent attempts at the protection of truth in moral and political inquiries? The doctrine, that, under perfect freedom of discus-

sion, falsehood would ultimately prevail, virtually implies the human faculties to be so constituted, as, all other things being the same, to cleave to error rather than to truth; in which case the pursuit of knowledge would be folly, since every step and every effort would carry us farther from our object. But the supposition of the ultimate triumph of falsehood is a fallacy disproved by the experience of mankind. Error may subvert error, one false doctrine may supersede another, and truth may be long undiscovered, and make its way slowly against the tide of prejudice; but that it has not only the power of overcoming its antagonist in equal circumstances, but also of surmounting every intellectual obstacle, every impediment but mere brute force, is proved by the general advancement of knowledge. If we trace the history of any science, we shall find it a record of mistakes and misconceptions, a narrative of misdirected and often fruitless efforts; yet if amidst all these the science has made a progress, the struggles through which it has passed, far from

evincing that the human mind is prone to error rather than to truth, furnish a decisive proof of the contrary, and an illustration of the fact, that, in the actual condition of humanity, mistakes are the necessary instruments by which truth is brought to light, or, at least, indispensable conditions of the process.

No one, perhaps, in the present day, although he might be the advocate of restraints on the discussion of theological and political topics, would be hardy enough to contest the justness of this remark, or contend for the utility of restrictions in mathematical and physical science: and yet, in this respect, all the various departments of knowledge stand on the same ground. Let those who think otherwise show us the distinctive characteristics which render it proper and expedient to shackle the discussion of particular topics, while every other subject is abandoned, without fear or precaution, alike to the conflicting play of the acutest intellects, and to the blunders of ignorance and imbecility.

What, however, we have to prove on the present occasion, is not, that truth if left to its own energy will finally triumph over prevailing error, but the less questionable position, that novel errors are not capable of overturning truths already established. The exercise of authority is, of course, always in support of established opinions; and since to be justifiable it must proceed on the assumption of their freedom from error, all that is necessary for our purpose is to show, that if they are as true as they are assumed to be, they cannot be subverted by the utmost latitude of discussion.

If they are true, then is there the highest probability, that every fresh examination to which they may be subjected will terminate in placing them in a clearer light; because every argument levelled against them must involve some fallacy which is liable to detection, and the exposure of which will tend to propagate and confirm them. The only cause why any opinions need to apprehend the touch of discussion is, that there is a certain process of reasoning by which they

may be proved to be wrong, and the discovery of which may result from the conflict of arguments. The nature of this predicament, in which true opinions can never stand, and all objections to them must ever remain, constitutes of itself a sufficient barrier against the encroachments of falsehood, were there no other to be found in the fixed habits and dispositions of the community. It is a work of difficulty to overturn even established error, because the interests, passions, and prejudices of so many are engaged in its support, and long resist the strongest arguments and the clearest demonstration: why then need we fear the overthrow of established truth by the utmost licence of discussion, when not only prescription, interest, prejudice, and passion, are in its favour, but the powerful alliance of reason itself?

In stating the grounds on which all restrictions must proceed, we limited our remarks to restrictions honestly intended for the benefit of the community, because no others can be openly maintained; and

whatever may be the real motives of those who impose or advocate them, the good of the public must be their ostensible aim. It is obvious, however, that restraints of this kind much more frequently owe their origin to the selfish fears and purposes of part of the community, than to just and liberal intentions with regard to the whole. Established opinions are so interwoven with the interests of individuals, that the subversion of one often threatens the ruin of the other. Hence the energy which strains every nerve in their support, and hence much of the rancour with which the slightest deviation is pursued.

SECTION VI.

ON THE FREE PUBLICATION OF OPINIONS AS AFFECTING THE PEOPLE AT LARGE.

We now come to a question naturally springing out of the present subject, and of no mean importance. It may be urged, that, granting the justness of the observations in the preceding chapter, there are other considerations of too momentous a nature to be overlooked. Free discussion may be the best means of promoting the progress of truth; but is the unbounded licence of disseminating all opinions the best way of propagating truth amongst those who may be presumed, from their situation in life, to be incompetent to judge for themselves? Would it not be wise to interpose some restraint to prevent the poor and the ignorant from being deluded by falsehood?

There are several strong reasons why any restrictions, imposed with a view to guard

the lower classes from error, would prove abortive, and even injurious. All restraints of this kind would imply, on the part of those who imposed them, that they themselves could infallibly determine what was true and what was false. But it is plain, as we have already remarked, that if such an assumption had always been acted upon, authority would have been frequently employed in suppressing truth and lending assistance to error; nor can we have better grounds for acting upon it now than the same strong conviction which clung to our predecessors. To see the matter in its proper light, we have only for a moment to consider what would have been the state of society in Europe, if the principle of guarding the poor from what the established authorities regarded as error, had been always successfully enforced. The whole experience of mankind on this subject proclaims, that regulations to keep the people from opinions which have been pronounced to be errors by fallible men, if they could accomplish their object, would prove the most

effectual engines that could be devised for perpetuating ignorance and falsehood.

Were it possible, nevertheless, for any set of men to discriminate the true nature of opinions with unerring accuracy, yet, in an age of improvement and a land of liberty, they could not confine the minds of the people to those ideas which they chose to impart to them. Unless the lower classes were kept in total darkness by the most intolerable despotism, it would be impossible to prevent them from participating in the discussions of their superiors in rank and knowledge. There are a thousand channels of communication which cannot be closed, and on every controvertible subject there is a certain train of doubts, difficulties, and objections, which nothing but utter ignorance can suppress. Truths, which have been the gradual result of inquiry and induction, of suppositions disproved and mistakes rectified, cannot always be introduced into the mind without a process somewhat similar to that by which they have been originally obtained.

Since then the poorer classes cannot be brought to limit their inquiries to what their superiors choose to set before them; since doubts and difficulties will necessarily start up in their minds, it becomes very questionable whether, even on the supposition of established opinions being true, more error would not prevail under a system of restriction than under perfect freedom of inquiry. All that authority could do in regard to contrary doctrines would be to prohibit their open expression or promulgation; it would have no power to extirpate them from the mind. Under a system of restraint, therefore, it is probable, that a multiplicity of errors would secretly exist; and as they would not be allowed to find public vent, they could not be refuted. They would, consequently, bid fair to have a far more durable and extensive prevalence than if they were openly expressed, and exposed to the rigorous test of general examination. It seems, indeed, an obvious if not an unavoidable policy, rather to encourage than repress the expression of dissent from established notions. A govern-

ment, whose fundamental principle was the happiness of the community, would act, in this respect, like a wise teacher, who encourages his pupils to propose the doubts and objections to which the imperfection of their knowledge may have given birth, and which can be removed from their minds only when they are known. The surest way of contracting the empire of error, is to increase the general power of discerning its character. In the present stage of civilization this is, in fact, all that can be done. The days of concealment and mystery are past. There is now no resource but in a system of fairness and open dealing; no feasible mode of preserving and propagating truth but by exalting ignorance into knowledge.

The universal education of the poor, which no earthly power can prevent, although it may retard it, is loudly demanded by the united voices of the moralist and politician. But if the people are to be enlightened at all, it is unavailing and inconsistent to resort to half measures and timid expedients; to treat them at once as men and as children; to endow

them with the power of thinking and at the same time to fetter its exercise; to make an appeal to their reason and yet to distrust its result; to give them the stomach of a lion and feed them with the aliment of a lamb. The promoters of the universal education of the poor ought to be aware, that they are setting in motion, or at least accelerating the action of an engine too powerful to be controlled at their pleasure, and likely to prove fatal to all those parts of their own systems, which rest not on the solid foundation of reality. They ought to know, that they are necessarily giving birth to a great deal of doubt and investigation; that they are undermining the power of prejudice, and the influence of mere authority and prescription; that they are creating an immense number of keen inquirers and original thinkers, whose intellectual force will be turned, in the first instance, upon those subjects which are dearest to the heart and of most importance to society.

In the further prosecution of this subject, it may be asked of the advocates of restric-

tive measures, by what conceivable regulations they could guard those from error, who were not able to judge for themselves, and at the same time secure the substantial advantages of unlimited discussion to the rest?

No human ingenuity could combine these two objects. No line of demarcation could be drawn between those who should be left to the operation of all arguments, which could be adduced, and those whose weakness or ignorance required the paternal arm of authority to shield them from falsehood. There can be no distinction made between the rich and the poor in these cases. Not to insist upon the fact, that many in the inferior ranks are quite as competent to the examination of any question, which bears upon moral or political conduct, as many in the highest stations; it is impracticable to devise a measure which shall exclude any particular classes, and leave the right of free examination unimpaired to the rest; so that, if we were under the necessity of allowing, that some evils might arise from admitting the poor to be a party in the examination

of a subject, it might still be contended, that such evils would be wisely encountered for the sake of those inestimable advantages, which follow the progress of truth, and which can be purchased only by liberty of public discussion. It may be further urged, to show the importance of maintaining this liberty unshackled, that the intelligence of the lower classes, the diminution of ignorance and error amongst them, must necessarily depend on the general progress of knowledge. While those, who have the best opportunities of information, are in darkness, those, who are in inferior stations, cannot be expected to be otherwise than proportionably more so. Whatever therefore tends to keep the former from becoming enlightened (as all restrictions inevitably do) must have a corresponding effect on the latter, or, in other words, tend to keep them in that state from which it is the professed object of restrictions to preserve them.

It is necessary to recollect that the real question is, not whether it is desirable that the poorer classes, or all classes, should be

preserved from error (about which there can be no dispute at this stage of our discussion), but whether it would be proper and expedient to attempt the accomplishment of that object by the interposition of authority. There are many acts which are highly injurious to society, but which we never attempt to suppress by legal enactments, because such a procedure would be either abortive or pregnant with greater evils than the evils against which it was directed. On this principle, ingratitude, cruelty, treachery, incontinence, and a number of other vices, are not touched by the laws, but left to the natural discouragements imposed by the moral sentiments of the community. On the same grounds, although erroneous opinions are injurious to society, and it would be an important benefit if their dissemination could be prevented, yet it would be inexpedient to endeavour to accomplish that object by legal restrictions. The attempt would be impolitic, because, as we have already shown, not only is it impossible to discriminate infallibly what is true from what is false, so as

to avoid suppressing truth and propagating falsehood ; but all restraints would be likely to defeat their own ends, or at all events would never be effectual unless pushed to the extreme of tyranny, and could not be imposed so as to accomplish their object without impeding the progress of knowledge.

But the people are not left to the inundation of falsehood without a remedy or protection. Restraints on the promulgation of opinions, even if they were proper and expedient on the supposition of their efficacy, and of the infallibility of those who imposed them, seem peculiarly unnecessary, since there is always a powerful means of counteracting what we conceive to be errors. Fallacies may be exposed, mis-statements detected, absurdities ridiculed. These are the natural and appropriate modes of repression; and while they must be ultimately successful, amongst all classes of people, unless the human mind is better adapted to the reception of falsehood than of truth (in which case the pursuit of knowledge would be folly), they possess the additional recommendation

of contributing to the detection of those fallacies which have mingled themselves with the sentiments of the most accurate judges. Here we have a legitimate method of disseminating our tenets, in which we may indulge without restraint, assured that whether right or wrong we shall contribute to the ultimate triumph of truth. In detecting falsehood and exposing it to general observation, we are far more effectually guarding all ranks from its influence, than by mysterious reserve and timorous precautions, which are always suspected of being employed in the support of opinions not capable of standing by their own strength.*

* See Note I.

SECTION VII.

ON THE ULTIMATE INEFFICACY OF RESTRAINTS ON THE PUBLICATION OF OPINIONS, AND THEIR BAD EFFECTS IN DISTURBING THE NATURAL COURSE OF IMPROVEMENT.

In the present state of the world, it is questionable, whether the progress of opinion can be much retarded by restraint and persecution; and it is certain, that it cannot be stopped. Where the arts and sciences are cultivated, and the press is in operation, restrictions on particular subjects must be in a great measure inefficacious, except in producing irritation and violence. The various branches of knowledge are so intimately connected, that it is a vain attempt to shackle any of them while the rest are at liberty. The general improvement of science will inevitably throw light on any prohibited subjects, and suggest conclusions with regard

to them which no authority can preclude from universal adoption.

Even if restraints partially succeed in their object, they will only retard the consummation, which they cannot prevent; they will only detain the community longer amidst that struggle of truth and falsehood, which must inevitably take place. Since there is a sort of regular process, which must be gone through, a course of doubts, and difficulties, and objections, before any disputable truth can be firmly settled in the minds of thinking men; the sooner this is accomplished the better; the sooner the objections and their answers, the difficulties and their solutions, are put on record, the greater the number of people who will be saved from uncertainty and from the trouble of winding through all the intricacies of the dispute. The interference of power cannot obviate this necessity, nor can it prevent the operation of those general causes, which are constantly at work on the understandings of men, and produce certain opinions in certain states of society and stages of civiliza-

tion. The utmost, then, that authority can do, is to retard the action of these general causes, to prolong the period of hesitation and uncertainty, and to disturb the natural progress of human improvement. It even sometimes happens (as we have already had occasion to notice), that restrictive measures defeat their own object, and accelerate the event they are intended to arrest or counteract. The mere attempt to suppress a doctrine has often been found to disseminate it more widely. There is a charm in secrecy, which often attracts the public mind to proscribed opinions. The curiosity roused by their being prohibited, a repugnance to oppression, an undefined suspicion, or tacit inference, that what requires the arm of power to suppress it must have some strong claims to credence, and various other circumstances, draw the attention of numbers, in whose eyes the matter in controversy, had it been freely discussed, would have been totally destitute of interest. Whatever is the severity of the law, some bold spirit every now and then sets it at defiance, and by so doing

spreads the obnoxious doctrine far more rapidly than it would have diffused itself had it been left unmolested.

In proportion to the inefficacy of restraints on the publication of opinions, the objections, which we have brought against them, would, of course, be weakened or removed. If they did not succeed in their object, they would be no impediment to the progress of truth; but although they should be ultimately ineffectual, they would still beget positive evils, by disturbing the natural course of improvement. In a country, or community, where no such restraints existed, it is obvious that no changes of opinion could well be sudden. Truth, at the best, makes but slow advances. Its light is at first confined to men of high station, learning, and abilities, and gradually spreads down to the other classes of society. The reluctance of the human mind to receive ideas contrary to its usual habits of thinking would be a sufficient security from violent transitions, did we not already possess another in the slowness with which the understanding makes

its discoveries. Arguments, by which prescriptive error is overturned, however plain and forcible they may be, are found out with difficulty, and in the first instance can be entered into only by enlarged and liberal minds, by whom they are subsequently familiarized and disseminated to others.

Now all restraints on the free examination of any subject are an interference with the natural and regular process here described, and produce mischievous irregularities. The gradual progress of opinion cannot be stopped, but it is interrupted. We no longer find it so insensibly progressive, that we can hardly mark the change but by comparing two distant periods. Under a system of restraint and coercion, we see apparently sudden revolutions in public sentiment. Opinions are cherished and spread, in the secrecy of fear, till the ardor with which they are entertained can no longer be repressed, and bursts forth into outrage and disorder. The passions become exasperated; the natural sense of injustice, which men will deeply feel as long as the world lasts at the

proscription or persecution of opinions, is roused into action, and a zeal is kindled for the propagation of doctrines, endeared to the heart by obloquy and suffering.

Such ebullitions are to be feared only where the natural operation of inquiry has been obstructed. As in the physical so in the moral world, it is repression which produces violence. Public opinion resembles the vapour, which in the open air is as harmless as the breeze, but which may be compressed into an element of tremendous power. When novel doctrines are kept down by force, they naturally resort to force to free themselves from restraints. Their advocates would seldom pursue violent measures, if such measures had not been first directed against them. What partly contributes to this violence is the effect produced by restraint on the moral qualities of men's minds. Compulsory silence, the necessity of confining to his own breast ardently cherished opinions, can never have a good influence on the character of any one. It has a tendency to make men morose and hypo-

critical, discontented and designing, and ready to risk much in order to rid themselves of their trammels; while the liberty of utter ing opinions, without obloquy and punishment, promotes satisfaction of mind and sincerity of conduct.

If these representations are correct, they distinctly mark out the course of enlightened policy. Whether established opinions are false or true, it is alike the interest of the community, that investigation should be unrestrained; in order that, if false, they may be discarded, and, if true, rendered conspicuous to all. The only way of fully attaining the benefits of truth is to suffer opinions to maintain themselves against attack, or fall in the contest. The terrors of the law are wretched replies to argument, disgraceful to a good, and feeble auxiliaries to a bad cause. If there was any fixed and unquestionable standard, by which the validity of opinions could be tried, there might be some sense, and some utility, in checking the extravagancies of opinion by legal interference; but since there is no other standard than the

general reason of mankind, discussion is the only method of trying the correctness of all doctrines whatever; and it is the highest presumption in any man, or any body of men, to erect their own tenets into a criterion of truth, and overwhelm dissent and opposition by penal inflictions. Such conduct can proceed on no principle, which would not justify all the persecutions, that disgrace the page of ecclesiastical history. Let established opinions be defended with the utmost power of reason, let the learning of schools and colleges be brought to their support, let elegance and taste display them in their most enchanting colours, let no labour, no expense, no arguments, no fascination, be spared in upholding their authority; but in the name of humanity resort not to the aid of the pillory and the dungeon. When they cannot be maintained by knowledge and reason, it will surely be time to suspect, that judicial severities will be but a feeble protection.

Whoever has attentively meditated on the progress of the human race cannot fail to

discern, that there is now a spirit of inquiry amongst men, which nothing can stop, or even materially control. Reproach and obloquy, threats and persecution, will be vain. They may embitter opposition and engender violence, but they cannot abate the keenness of research. There is a silent march of thought, which no power can arrest, and which it is not difficult to foresee will be marked by important events. Mankind were never before in the situation in which they now stand. The press has been operating upon them for several centuries, with an influence scarcely perceptible at its commencement, but daily becoming more palpable, and acquiring accelerated force. It is rousing the intellect of nations, and happy will it be for them if there be no rash interference with the natural progress of knowledge; and if, by a judicious and gradual adaptation of their institutions to the inevitable changes of opinion, they are saved from those convulsions, which the pride, prejudices, and obstinacy of a few may occasion to the whole.*

* See Note K.

MISCELLANEOUS
ESSAYS.

ESSAY III.

ON

FACTS AND INFERENCES.

Dr. Reid, in that part of his Essays on the Intellectual Powers where he treats of the supposed fallacy of the senses, points out an important distinction between what our senses actually testify, and the conclusions which we draw from their testimony.

"Many things," says he, "called deceptions of the senses, are only conclusions rashly drawn from the testimony of the senses. In these cases the testimony of the senses is true, but we rashly draw a conclusion from it, which does not necessarily follow. We are disposed to impute our errors rather to false information than to inconclusive reasoning, and to blame our senses for the wrong conclusions we draw from their testimony.

"Thus," he continues, "when a man has taken a counterfeit guinea for a true one, he says his senses deceived him; but he lays the blame where it ought not to be laid: for we must ask him, Did your senses give a false testimony of the colour, or of the figure, or of the impression? No. But this is all that they testified, and this they testified truly: from these premises you concluded that it was a true guinea, but this conclusion does not follow; you erred therefore, not by relying upon the testimony of sense, but by judging rashly from its testimony."*

This confounding of facts and inferences, so acutely exposed by Dr. Reid, is not, however, confined to cases in which we have the testimony of our own senses. The remark may be extended to every department of knowledge, which depends on observation, for in all we are continually liable to the same mistake. If we attend to the understandings of the majority of mankind, we

* Essays on the Intellectual Powers, page 291.

shall discover an utter confusion in this respect. Their opinions are a confused and indiscriminate mass, in which facts and inferences, realities and suppositions, are blended together, and conceived, not only as of equal authority, but as possessing the same character. In other words, inferences, or assumptions from facts, are regarded as forming part of the facts. This is particularly observable with regard to the relation of cause and effect. That one thing is the cause of another may be either actually witnessed, or merely inferred; the connection of two events may be, to us, either a fact, or a conclusion deduced from appearances; a difference which may be easily illustrated. For this purpose, let us suppose the case of a stone falling from a rock, and crushing a flower at its base. To an eye-witness, it would be a fact, and not an inference, that the falling of the stone was the cause of the injury sustained by the flower. But suppose a man passed by, after the rock had fallen, and, perceiving a flower crushed and a stone near it which appeared to be a frag-

ment recently disjoined from the cliffs above, pronounced, that the flower had been crushed by the stone, he would not be stating a fact but making an inference. The man, who saw the piece of rock fall upon the flower, and crush it, could not be mistaken; but he who inferred the same thing from the appearance of the cliffs and the proximity of the stone, might be wrong. because the flower might possibly have been crushed in some other manner. There would evidently be an opening for error. It would be possible, for instance, although it might be highly improbable, that some person had purposely taken off a piece from the rock, and, after crushing the flower with his foot, had laid the stone by its side, in order to mislead any body that came after him. If we analyze this case and separate the facts from the inferences, we shall find the whole of the facts to be these; that a flower was crushed, that a stone lay near it, and that the cliffs above exhibited a certain peculiar appearance. The inferences from these facts are, that the stone fell from the

cliffs and crushed the flower in its descent. By this separation of facts and inferences we clearly see where there is perfect certainty, and where there is a possibility of error.

There cannot be a better illustration of the mistakes into which a neglect of this distinction leads, than the general opinion of the ignorant part of mankind, that the sun revolves round the earth, which is manifestly an inference drawn from observing that the earth and the sun change their relative position. This is the whole of the fact: that the sun makes a revolution round the earth is an inference to account for the phenomenon; yet so immediately is this inference suggested, so closely does it follow on appearances, that it is almost universally received as a matter of fact; and a man might as well attempt to dislodge the sun from his position as to displace the opinion from the mind of one who had grown up to maturity in the belief of it. He would probably ask, if you wished to persuade him that he could not see, or whether it was likely that he could acquiesce

in your arguments rather than the evidence of his senses.

It is this blending of facts and inferences, which is at the bottom of the objections of mere matter-of-fact men to the conclusions of political economy, and of the assumptions continually made with regard to that science, that theory and experience are at war. We may discern it in the common prejudices against machinery for superseding manual labour. A matter-of-fact man, as soon as he sees a number of workmen destitute of employment, from the fluctuations incident to commerce, begins to lament that, in modern times, so much machinery should be employed, when so many labourers are idle, and regards it as an indisputable fact, that the machinery has occasioned the mischief. "Do we not see," exclaim persons of this class, "that these machines perform operations that would require hundreds of human beings, and thereby deprive them of employment? Is it not clear, that if no machines existed these idle hands would be set to work; and would you persuade us not

to believe our own eyes?" The only facts in this case, however, are, that the machinery is in operation, and the men are destitute of employment. That one is the cause of the other (which may or may not be true) is an inference to account for the state of affairs; and an inference, which, though it may sometimes be just, on the first introduction of machinery, is in general at variance with the clearest principles of political science.

The utility of the distinction here pointed out is very perceptible in all questions of national policy. In public affairs there is commonly such a multiplicity of principles in operation, so many concurring and counteracting circumstances, such an intermixture of design and accident, that the utmost caution is necessary in referring events to their origin; while in no subject of human speculation, perhaps, is there a greater confusion of realities and assumptions. It is sufficient for the majority of political reasoners, that two events are co-existent or consecutive. To their conception it immediately becomes

a fact, that one is the cause of the other. They see a minister in office, or an abuse in existence, or a factious demagogue at work, during the prevalence of national distress or disorder; and by a compendious logic they identify the minister, or the abuse, or the demagogue, with the evil, and make it an article in their creed, that the removal of one would be the removal of both. The coexistence, however, of these two things is not sufficient to establish their connection, and all beyond their coexistence is inferential, and requires to be supported by proof.

We cannot more aptly elucidate this part of our subject than by referring to the discussion of such questions as the policy of educating the poor. To prove the advantages of this measure, an advocate for the diffusion of knowledge generally brings an instance of some country where education has extensively prevailed through all ranks, and which has at the same time been distinguished for moral excellence. This is called an appeal to facts; but it is obvious, that the only facts are the coexistence of a sys-

tem of education with virtuous conduct, and that the main force of the argument lies, not in a fact, but in an inference, that one is the cause of the other. This inference may be highly probable, but it requires to be proved itself before it can be admitted as a positive proof of any thing else.* The same observation applies to the arguments of those speculators, who begin to doubt the advantages of the plan of education lately pursued with the poor in England, on the ground, that immorality appears to increase. Assuming it to be true, that immorality has increased since the introduction of the plan, yet this by no means establishes it as a fact, that one has been the effect of the other. A careful induction of circumstances, or a clear process of reasoning from general principles, would be necessary to prove such a connection between them.

The tendency to confound these two dif-

* It may be added, that the proofs necessary to establish the *inference* are altogether different from the proofs of the *facts themselves*.

ferent things is not the least remarkable in the practice of medicine. It extensively pervades the pretended knowledge of ignorant practitioners, and the empiricism of people in all ranks of life. If any particular change ensues after taking a drug, the drug is at once assumed to be the cause of the change; it is immediately set down as an indisputable fact, that such a medicine is a certain remedy for such a complaint. It is in reality, however, one of the most delicate tasks, and forms one of the greatest difficulties of medical practice, to discriminate, amidst a complication of circumstances preceding any effect, that particular circumstance which has occasioned it. In no cases, perhaps, are men more liable to err than these; in none is patient investigation less attended to, or more necessary, and precipitancy of inference more carefully to be avoided. In none is it of more importance to make the distinction, which it has been the object of this essay to point out.

These remarks serve to show, what may at first sight appear paradoxical, that those

men, who are generally designated as practical and experienced, have often as much of the hypothetical interwoven in their opinions as the most speculative theorists. Half of their facts are mere inferences, rashly and erroneously drawn. They may have no systematic hypotheses in their minds, but they are full of assumptions without being aware of it. It is impossible, that men should witness simultaneous or consecutive events without connecting them in their imaginations as causes and effects. There is a continual propensity in the human mind to establish these relations amongst the phenomena subjected to its observation, and to consider them as possessing the character of facts. But in doing this there is great liability to error, and the opinions of a man, who has formed them from what Lord Bacon calls "mera palpatio," purely from what he has come in personal contact with, cannot but abound with rash and fallacious conclusions, for which he fancies himself to have the authority of his own senses, or of indisputable experience.

ESSAY IV.

ON THE

INFLUENCE OF REASON ON THE FEELINGS.

Some philosophers have proposed as a curious subject of investigation, the mutual influence of the mind and the body, and the laws which regulate their connection. It would not perhaps be less curious, though it would be far more difficult, to trace the influence of the sensitive and intellectual parts of our nature upon each other. The understanding is affected in various ways by the feelings and passions; and on the other hand the state of the passions greatly depends on the combination of ideas before the mind, or, in other words, on the state of the intellect. To investigate all the laws of this reciprocal action would require powers of

close observation and acute analysis, greater than we could hope to bring to the task. In a former essay we touched upon the subject, in attempting to explain the influence which the passions exert on the judgments of the understanding; and we shall now offer a few remarks on the influence which the conclusions of our reason exert on the passions.

Our speculative conclusions, it will be immediately acknowledged, have not always complete power over our feelings; or, in other words, our feelings do not invariably conform to the previous convictions of our judgment. The opinion, that we ought to feel in a certain manner on a certain occasion is often ineffectual in producing the proper emotion. Our view of the impropriety and absurdity of a passion does not allay it. A man, for example, may feel painfully vexed at some trivial circumstance, and although he is sensible of the folly of suffering his tranquillity to be disturbed by a thing of no importance, yet this consideration fails to restore the tone of his mind, and it would

probably be incapable of preventing the same emotion on a recurrence of the same circumstances. Even the philosopher, who from the heights of contemplation, from the "edita doctrinâ sapientum templa serena," looks down on the vain pursuits of his fellow-creatures, and distinctly sees their worthlessness, and the folly of the passions which they engender, is unable to resist the domination of the same influences when he descends from his elevation and mingles with the crowd.

This insubordination of the sensitive to the intellectual part of our nature, is more particularly remarkable in those associations of thought and feeling, which we have acquired in early life. Before we have well emerged from infancy, our moral and intellectual constitution has been so far formed, that certain ideas or circumstances awaken peculiar emotions in the breast, with almost as much precision as the touch of the finger elicits from the keys of a harpsichord their respective musical notes. In the progress of life, however, we discover that some of

these feelings are improper and inappropriate to the occasions on which they arise; and yet, even after this discovery, they still beset us whenever the same occasions recur. Present objects awaken our dormant associations, and the cool conclusions of our reason sink forgotten from the mind. The prejudices of the nursery have been commonly adduced in illustration of this principle of our mental constitution. Few persons (to take a trite example), who have been taught in their infancy to dread the appearance of ghosts in the dark, are enabled so entirely to shake off their early associations as, at all times and in all places, to feel perfectly free from apprehension in the dead of night, however strong their conviction may be of the absurdity of their fears.

We may observe the like pertinacious adherence of feelings, at variance with our reason, in those who are subject to the passion of *mauvaise honte.* To this passion some are doubtless constitutionally more prone than others; but the strength of it, and the occa-

sions on which it is evinced, depend greatly on the associations of ideas and feelings formed in early life. If a child is brought up, for instance, in a family where receiving and paying visits are regarded as extraordinary events, and attended by formality and constraint of manner, company becomes formidable to his imagination; and it will require frequent intercourse with society in after-life to overcome the effects of such an impression. Notwithstanding the clearest perception of the absurdity of feeling embarrassed before his fellow-creatures, he will often find himself disconcerted in their presence, and thrown into confusion by trifles which his good sense thoroughly despises. In the same manner, an involuntary deference for rank may be observed amidst the strongest conviction of the emptiness of aristocratical distinctions, and the most decided republican principles. The lingering spirit of the feudal system, and the general forms and institutions of society in Europe, have a tendency to infuse into the minds of certain classes such feelings of respect for the great-

ness of high life, as, when they find themselves in its presence, sometimes overpower the opposite influence of mature opinions.* It is the force of such impresions that produces so much awkwardness in the manners of our peasantry, and it is freedom from them that often gives an air of dignity to the deportment of the savage.

In religion, the strong power of associa-

* The powerful effect of such associations is forcibly depicted by Madame de Staël, in the following passage of her posthumous work, where she exhibits the sentiments of the lower classes towards the Aristocracy during the French Revolution :—

" One would have said that nobody in France could look at a man of consequence, that no member of the *Tiers Etat* could approach a person belonging to the court, without feeling himself in subjection. Such are the melancholy effects of arbitrary government, and of too exclusive distinctions of rank! The animadversions of the lower orders on the aristocratic body have not the effect of destroying its ascendancy, even over those by whom it is hated; the inferior classes, in the sequel, inflicted death on their former masters, as the only method of ceasing to obey them."—*Considerations on the Principal Events of the French Revolution*, vol. i, page 348 (English Translation).

tions in opposition to the convictions of the understanding, is peculiarly worthy of notice, especially in the case of changes from a superstitious to a more rational and liberal creed. The force of a man's education has perhaps long held him in bondage, and his whole feelings have become interwoven with the tenets of his sect. By the enlargement of his knowledge, however, he discovers his early opinions to be erroneous; different conclusions force themselves on his understanding, and his faith undergoes a radical alteration. Yet his former feelings still cling to his mind. A long time must often elapse before he can cast off the authority of his old prepossessions. It is not always that the mind can keep itself at a proper elevation for viewing such subjects in a clear light; and, till it has acquired the power of retaining its vantage-ground, it may be reduced to its former state by the influence of vivid recollections, customary circumstances, general opinion, or any thing which may occasionally overpower its vigour, or dim its perspicacity. Thus men,

who have rejected vulgar creeds in the days of health and prosperity, manfully opposing their clear and comprehensive views to prevailing superstitions, have sometimes exhibited the melancholy spectacle of again stooping to their shackles in the hour of sickness, and at the approach of death; not because their understandings were convinced of error by any fresh light, but because they were unable to keep their rational conclusions steadily in view; because that intellectual strength, which repelled absurd dogmas, had sunk beneath the pressure of disease, or the fears of nature, and left the defenceless spirit to the predominance of early associations, and to the inroads of superstitious terror. Such men are replunged into their old prejudices, exactly in the same way as he, who has thrown off the superstitions of the nursery, is overpowered, as he passes through a churchyard at midnight, by his infantile associations.*

It has been somewhere remarked, that in the soaring of a bird there is a contest be-

* See Note L.

tween its muscular power and the force of gravitation; and that, although the former always overcomes the latter, when the bird chooses to exert it, yet the force of gravity is sure to prevail in the end, and bring the wearied pinions to the ground. Thus it is with associations, which have laid firm hold of the mind in early youth, which have mixed themselves with every incident, and wound themselves round every object. The mind may frequently rise above them, discard them, despise them, and leave them at an infinite distance; but it is still held by the fine and invisible attraction of its antiquated feelings and opinions, which, whenever its vigour relaxes, draws it back into the limits from which it had burst away in the plenitude of its powers.

It is worthy of remark, that there are moments when old associations are revived with peculiar vividness by very trivial circumstances. A noble author has described such moments with his usual felicity, in the two following stanzas. What he so happily says of sorrowful emotions, may be ex-

tended, with little qualification, to almost every passion of the human breast.

> But ever and anon of griefs subdued
> There comes a token like a scorpion's sting,
> Scarce seen, but with fresh bitterness imbued;
> And slight withal may be the things which bring
> Back on the heart the weight which it would fling
> Aside for ever: it may be a sound—
> A tone of music—summer's eve—or spring,
> A flower—the wind—the ocean—which shall wound,
> Striking the electric chain wherewith we are darkly bound;
>
> And how, and why we know not, nor can trace
> Home to its cloud this lightning of the mind,
> But feel the shock renewed, nor can efface
> The blight and blackening which it leaves behind,
> Which out of things familiar, undesigned,
> When least we deem of such, calls up to view
> The spectres whom no exorcism can bind,
> The cold—the changed—perchance the dead—anew,
> The mourned, the loved, the lost—too many!—yet how few!

It is in general very difficult, and even impracticable, to recal at will the peculiar

* *Childe Harold*, canto iv.

emotions which have affected us at some distant period of life; because though we may remember the circumstances wherein we were placed, they no longer operate on our sensibility in the same way. We may recollect our joy or our sorrow, but we cannot reproduce in ourselves the same affections. What, however, we are unable purposely to effect, is frequently accomplished by a few touches on the harpsichord, by the fragrance of a flower, or the song of a bird. These simple instruments have the power of awakening emotions which have been dormant for years, and calling up the images, the impressions, the associations of some almost forgotten moment of past life, with all the vividness which they originally possessed. Our recollection seizes from oblivion the very hue which every thing then wore around us. Our heart catches the very tone which then impressed it. A sudden gleam of renovated feeling rescues one spot from the surrounding darkness of the past.

To return from this digression: the effect,

which we before attempted to describe, seems to spring from the power of the passion to engross and concentrate our attention to its objects, and by necessary consequence to withdraw it from all others. The passion is strongly associated with certain ideas or circumstances; when those ideas or circumstances are presented to the mind the passion is roused, and when roused absorbs the attention, to the inevitable exclusion of sober and rational views.*

Has reason then no power whatever in

* The effect of prevailing passion (however excited) is not ill described by the pen of a celebrated female writer of the present day:—

"Under the influence of any passion the perception of pain and pleasure alters as much as the perceptions of a person in a fever vary from those of the same man in sound health. The whole scale of individual happiness, as well as of general good and evil, virtue and vice, is often disturbed at the very rising of the passion, and totally overthrown in the hurricane of the soul. Then, in the most perilous and critical moments, the conviction of the understanding is, if not reversed, suspended. Those, who have lived long in the world, and who have seen examples of these truths, feel that these are not mere words."—*Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth*, vol. ii. p. 403.

these and similar cases? Is it of no use to attain clear and rational convictions, since they thus desert us in the hour when we most require their assistance? These questions are important, and we will venture a few remarks by way of reply to them.

It is evident, in the first place, that we are only occasionally liable to those relapses in which the feelings overpower the judgment; it is only when our understanding is enfeebled and its views beclouded, or when we are placed within the sphere of some strong exciting cause. During the greatest part of our time, our deliberate convictions will necessarily regulate our feelings and our actions. A man convinced of the absurdity of a belief in spectral appearances will feel and act throughout the day, and commonly in the night, agreeably to that conviction; it can only be under some striking circumstances that his old associations will predominate. In the same way, an individual, who feels more deference perhaps in the personal presence of a great man than he chooses to acknowledge, may

at other periods be perfectly independent of him, and altogether uninfluenced by any such emotion. The utility, therefore, of acquiring just views, will not be materially impaired by the difficulty of conforming our emotions to them on particular occasions. And it may be further remarked, that the value of such views lies, not so much in the efficacy of their counteraction during the access of any passion, as in enabling us to avoid the occasions on which it will be improperly excited; and in rendering the mind less liable to be thrown into that state, or to have its sensibilities improperly awakened. The fear of nocturnal apparitions, it is obvious would not be so easily roused in one who had freed himself from the prejudices of the nursery, although not altogether from the power of the associations there formed, as in one whose belief and associations on that subject were in harmony.

But the conclusions of our reason have not only the power of rendering the mind less susceptible of emotions when brought within the sphere of the exciting cause, less

liable to have opposite associations roused, they have sometimes a still farther effect. A conviction may be so strongly wrought into the understanding, so powerfully impressed on the imagination, as entirely to subvert former associations. Clear and comprehensive views, habitually entertained, may completely subdue the insubordination of the sensitive part of our nature; and so effectually dissolve the combinations of feeling formed in early life, as to reduce them to mere objects of cool reminiscence. The conclusions of our reason may, in time, be so strongly associated with the objects as to be suggested by them more readily than the feelings with which those objects were so intimately blended. This, however, must be the work of time, the gradual effect of habitual thought. In the endeavour so to discipline his mind, a man may expect to be repeatedly baffled, but he must still return to his purpose; he must keep his dispassionate conclusions steadily before him, till they come to form part of the familiar views of his understanding, and are inter-

woven with his habitual feelings. Success may follow such an attempt on the part of the philosopher, and indeed some degree of the effect will necessarily attend every acquisition of sound knowledge; but in general the erroneous associations of mankind will be found of too inveterate a nature to be thoroughly eradicated, and will maintain an occasional ascendancy amidst all the advances of truth and the triumphs of reason.

ESSAY V.

ON

INATTENTION TO THE DEPENDANCE OF CAUSES AND EFFECTS IN MORAL CONDUCT.

PART I.

In the physical world, to whatever part we turn our eyes, we are presented with a regular succession of causes and effects. By gradual, and almost imperceptible experience, man learns to accommodate his actions to the fixed laws and ascertainable properties of matter; and by observing the conjunction and succession of phenomena, he acquires the power of foreseeing events in their causes. Nor is he a mere spectator of the operations of nature, but in many cases he interferes with her processes, and after gathering her laws from observation, he employs their agency in the production of novel

results for the accomplishment of his purposes. By observing the train of physical events, which lie beyond his control, he can frequently regulate his actions in such a manner as to avoid hurtful, and derive advantage from beneficial effects, which he cannot prevent or produce: and where he is enabled actively to interfere with her processes he can do more, he can arrest or avert evils, and create positive benefits.

What a man can do in the material, he may also accomplish in a similar manner in the moral world. The moral and intellectual qualities of the human race present an equal field for observation and sagacity. Certain actions lead to certain results, or are means connected with certain ends; and by observing the faculties and conduct of himself and others, he may trace the connections thus subsisting between them. If he desires a good, depending on the state of his own mind, or of the minds of his fellow creatures, he must find out and employ the means with which it is conjoined; if he wishes to shun an evil of the same nature,

he must ascertain and avoid the actions of which it is the effect. The happiness of his life will thus essentially depend on a strict attention to the tendencies and consequences of human actions. Many of the practical errors of mankind seem to spring from a heedlessness of these tendencies; from an ignorance or misconception of the course of events, or, in other words, from a wrong or inadequate apprehension of the dependance of causes and effects. In their plans, pursuits, and general conduct they too often betray a negligence of consequences, a hope against experience, a defiance of probabilities, a vagueness of anticipation, which looks for results where no proper means have been employed to produce them: their actions frequently seem to indicate a blind expectation that the order of nature will be violated in their favour, and that, amidst the apparently irregular incidents and fortuitous vicissitudes of the world, they as individuals will escape the common lot, and prove exceptions to general rules. All this principally arises from the want of a little

vigorous attention, and close reasoning. Nothing, perhaps, gives its possessor such a decided superiority over the multitude as the power of clearly tracing the consequences of actions, the concatenation of mental causes and effects, and the adaptation of moral means to ends. It is a sagacity of the utmost importance in the conduct of life.

The errors, which have been adverted to, manifest themselves in various ways. The vague expectation of gaining advantages without employing proper means may be seen in those who are perpetually in search of short and easy roads to knowledge; flattering themselves, that by the indolent perusal of abridgments and compendiums, or the sacrifice of an occasional hour at a popular lecture, they will, without much application, imbibe that learning, which they see confers so much distinction on others. They forget, that, from the very nature of the case, science cannot be obtained without labour; that ideas must be frequently presented to the mind before they become familiar to it; that the faculties must be vigo-

rously exerted to possess much efficiency; that skill is the effect of habit; and that habit is acquired by the frequent repetition of the same act. Application is the only means of securing the end at which they aim; and they may rest assured, that all schemes to put them in possession of intellectual treasures, without any regular or strenuous efforts on their part, all promises to insinuate learning into their minds at so small an expense of time and labour that they shall scarcely be sensible of the process, are mere delusions, which can terminate in nothing but disappointment and mortification. It cannot be too deeply impressed on the mind, that application is the price to be paid for mental acquisitions, and that it is as absurd to expect them without it, as to hope for a harvest where we have not sown the seed.

As men often deceive themselves with the hope of acquiring knowledge without application, so they calculate on acquiring wealth without industry and economy, and repine that another should bear away the

prize which they have made no effort to secure. Or, perhaps, impatient of this slow though certain process, they attempt to seize the end by some extraordinary means, and carry by a single stroke what humbler individuals are content to win by regular and tedious approaches. They see the schemes of other adventurers continually failing, yet they press forward in the same course, in defiance of probability, and in the hope of proving singular exceptions to the general doom. Their bold speculations it is true, may sometimes succeed, but they usually terminate in ruin. Disaster is the highly probable issue, and their certain consequence is a state of anxiety and suspense for which no success can atone.

But the most important mistakes of the class under consideration are those into which men fall in their moral conduct. Misery in one shape or other is the inevitable consequence of all vice; and a man can scarcely be under a greater delusion than to suppose that he can in any instance add to his happiness by a sacrifice of principle.

Yet, from the want of a clear perception of the tendencies of actions, it is too often assumed, that vice would be pleasant enough were it not forbidden; and many a one indulges his guilty passions because he knows the pleasure to be certain, while the punishment, he flatters himself, is only contingent. Every departure from virtue, however, draws after it a train of evils, which no art can escape. The ruin of health is the consequence of intemperance and debauchery, the contempt and mistrust of mankind follow upon deceit and dishonesty, and all other deviations from moral rectitude are attended by their respective evil effects. Some of these consequences are certain and uniform, and if others do not invariably follow, they ought to be considered in practice as inevitable from the rarity of the anomalous instances. Between acting against possibility, and against a high degree of probability, there is little difference in point of wisdom. General rules will fail, or appear unnecessary, in particular instances; but as these instances cannot be foreseen, and are few in num-

ber, he who wishes to secure the end, which the general rule has in view, must observe it, and would be guilty of folly to speculate on its exceptions. If a man wishes to be a long liver, he must adopt habits of sobriety and temperance, as the most likely way of obtaining his purpose, notwithstanding the instances of a few individuals who have reached a good old age in direct violation of this precept. Men should recollect, too, before cheating themselves into the hope of impunity in vice, that however they may escape some of the peculiar effects, they can have no security against its general consequences. All vices are accompanied by self-degradation, as the substance by the shadow; by a deterioration of character fraught with incalculable mischief to our future peace; by the contempt, suspicion, or indignation of our fellow-creatures on their discovery; and whether discovered or undiscovered, they are pursued by that secret uneasiness, which, by the constitution of our nature, is the doom of guilt, however successful, or however concealed. A man may,

indeed, proceed for a time in the career of iniquity, with a seeming carelessness, and enjoyment, and obduracy of conscience: but as long as the human mind retains its present structure, he can never be sure, that the next moment will not plunge him into the acutest agonies of remorse.

Virtuous actions, and virtuous qualities, on the contrary, may be regarded as the necessary, or most likely means to secure certain good ends; as roads terminating in pleasant places. Thus honesty is the means of inspiring confidence, veracity of obtaining credit for what we say, and temperance of preserving health. If we would be esteemed, loved, and confided in, we must evince qualities which are estimable, amiable, and calculated to attract confidence. The error of many consists in expecting to arrive at the place without travelling the road. They imagine that they can retain health of body and peace of mind amidst sensuality, cruelty, and injustice, and calculate on the respect of their neighbours in the face of actions almost beneath con-

tempt. It would be as rational to form expectations of reaching London by pursuing a northerly route from Edinburgh, or of prolonging life by poisoned nutriment.

Nor let any man suppose, that he can reap the advantages of virtue by hypocritical pretension. There is a consistency of conduct which a hypocrite can scarcely maintain; and even if he could secure some of the particular ends, which virtuous qualities are the means of gaining, there is a general result in serenity of mind, purity of taste, and elevation of character, which lies infinitely beyond his reach.

These errors, this disregard of consequences and irrational expectation of advantages, without adopting appropriate measures to obtain them, may be particularly observed to prevail in domestic life. Of the miscalculation, that we shall be loved and respected without evincing amiable and estimable qualities, we may there see abundant instances. Parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, reciprocally complain of each other's

deficiency of affection, and think it hard, that the tie of relationship should not secure invariable kindness and indestructible love. They expect some secret influence of blood, some physical sympathy, some natural attraction, to retain the affection of their relatives, without any solicitude on their part to cherish or confirm it. They forget that man is so constituted as to love only what in some way or other, directly or indirectly, immediately or remotely, gives him pleasure; that even natural affection is the result of pleasurable associations in his mind, or at least may be overcome by associations of an opposite character, and that the sure way to make themselves beloved is to display amiable qualities to those whose regard they wish to obtain. If our friends appear to look upon us with little interest, if our arrival is seen without pleasure, and our departure without regret, instead of charging them with a deficiency of feeling, we should turn our scrutiny upon ourselves. The well directed eye of self-examination might probably find out, that their indiffer-

ence arises from a want on our part of those qualities which are requisite to inspire affection; that it is the natural and necessary consequence of our own character and deportment. It is a folly to flatter ourselves, that our estimation, either in the circle of our friends or in the world at large, will not take its colour from the nature of our conduct. There is scarcely one of our actions, our habits, or our expressions, which may not have its share in that complex feeling with which we are regarded by others.

It is true, that all the pleasurable associations, formed with regard to each other in the minds of those who are connected by blood, do not depend on the personal character of their object, and that some of them can scarcely be eradicated by any possible errors of conduct. A mother's love is the result of an extensive combination of ideas and feelings, in which, for a long time, the moral and mental qualities of her child can have little share; but even her affection, supported as it is by all the strength of such associations, may be weakened, if not destroyed,

by the ill-temper, ingratitude, or worthlessness of her offspring. The affection subsisting between other relatives must of course be far more liable to be impaired by similar causes, and must chiefly depend for its continuance on personal character. As vicious qualities may prove too strong for natural affection, so, on the other hand, amiable qualities are frequently found to inspire love, even under circumstances of a very contrary tendency; as may be seen in the attachment sometimes evinced by beautiful women to men of ugly features or deformed persons. To see the same countenance, however defective in form, constantly preserving an expression of tenderness amidst all the cares and disappointments of life, to hear language of uniform kindness, and be the object of nameless acts of regard, can hardly fail, whatever other circumstances may operate, to beget feelings of reciprocal affection.

ESSAY V.

ON

INATTENTION TO THE DEPENDANCE OF CAUSES AND EFFECTS IN MORAL CONDUCT.

PART II.

WHILE it will be found, that many circumstances, in every man's condition, are exactly such as might be expected to result from the qualities of his mind, and the tenor of his conduct, it must not be overlooked, that there are many others over which he has no control. Human life is a voyage, in which he can choose neither the vessel nor the weather, although much may be done in the management of the sails and the guidance of the helm. There are a thousand unavoidable accidents which circumscribe the command he possesses over his own fortune. With the greatest industry he may be sud-

denly plunged into poverty; amidst the strictest observance of temperance he may be afflicted with disease; and in the practice of every virtue that adorns human life he may be the victim of misfortune, from the ingratitude and baseness of his fellow men, the untimely dissolution of cherished connections, or the wreck of schemes prudently formed, and of hopes wisely cherished.

Miseries and misfortunes like these, not depending on the conduct or character, it would be unreasonable to expect that conduct to be able to avert; but amidst them all he will not cease to feel, in various ways, the beneficial consequences and consolatory influence of his good actions. In the estimation of some people, a virtuous man ought never to be subject to accidental calamity; but it would probably be difficult to assign a reason why he should be more exempt than a man of contrary character, from the misery arising out of occurrences beyond human control. Why, it may be asked, should the vicious man suffer any

thing but the consequences of his vices, including of course the reproaches of his own conscience, and the actions as well as sentiments which his conduct occasions in others? These bad consequences, and the loss of that happiness which virtue would have brought in her train, constitute, it may be said, the proper difference between his fate and the fate of the virtuous man, and form a natural and sufficient reason, both to himself and others, for acting differently in future. Other evils which may happen to him can never operate to deter him from his guilty career, because he can see no connection that they have with it.

Whatever opinion we may entertain, however, as to the reasonableness of all men being on a level with regard to accidental and uncontrollable evils, the fact is certain, that in the actual condition of mankind we do not see the virtuous enjoying an exemption from any evils but such as are the peculiar consequences of those vices from which they refrain; nor, on the other hand, do we see the vicious deprived of any bene-

fits but such as are to be attained exclusively by virtuous conduct. We should expect, therefore, from virtuous actions and qualities only their peculiar consequences; and, in recommending them to others, we should be careful to do it on just and proper grounds. It is injurious to the cause of good morals to invest virtue with false powers, because every day's experience may detect the fallacy, and he who has proved the unsoundness of part of our recommendation, may reasonably grow suspicious of the whole. Many of our writers of fiction, with the best intentions, injure the cause which they support, by rewarding virtuous conduct with accidental good fortune. After involving a good man, for example, in a combination of calamitous circumstances, in which he conducts himself with scrupulous honour and integrity, they extricate him from his difficulties, as a reward for his virtue, by the unexpected discovery of a rich uncle, who was supposed to have died in poverty; or by a large legacy from a distant relation, who happened most opportunely to quit the

world at the required crisis. All such representations, leading as they do to the expectation of fortuitous advantages in recompense of good actions, cannot be otherwise than pernicious. If writers wish to represent a good man contending with misfortune (by which they may certainly convey a most excellent lesson) their aim ought to be, to exhibit the sources of consolation which he finds, as well in his own consciousness, as in the impression which his conduct has made on those around him; in the esteem, gratitude, and affection of those amongst whom he has lived, and in the actions on their part to which these sentiments give birth.

The true moral of fictitious writings lies in the clear exhibition of the tendencies of actions; and if any thing is conceded to the production of effect, it ought to be, not a change in the character of these tendencies, but a more lucid developement of them than life actually presents. Although the painter is allowed to unite beauties on his canvass which are rarely presented by na-

ture in actual combination, and to sink all those attendant circumstances, which, however commonly occurring, would impair the effect to be produced, still he must faithfully adhere to the qualities of natural objects; and, in the same way, although the dramatist may give us a selection of actions and incidents disentangled from superfluous details and accompaniments, he must exhibit them according to their true tendencies and relations.

There is another consideration relative to the present subject which is deserving of notice. What appears the inevitable consequence of circumstances not in our power, is frequently the natural effect of some subordinate part of our character. The industrious man, who appears at first sight to have been ruined by the misconduct of others, or by some unexpected revolution in the business of society, may in reality owe his ruin to a want of circumspection, prudence, or foresight. The natural consequence of his industry was prosperity, but the natural consequence of his imprudence

was loss and misfortune. We must not expect that the exercise of one virtue will be followed by the beneficial consequences of all, neither must we conclude that the indulgence of any vice will be pursued by unmixed evil, and destroy the good effects of better qualities. All the virtues and the vices have their respective good and evil consequences, which will be felt in proportion as each vice and virtue is exercised. Industry, economy, shrewdness, and caution, for instance, without any great admixture of moral worth, or even in conjunction with meanness and fraudulence, may often be successful in the attainment of wealth; while these qualities, so attended, can never yield the fruits of integrity, ease of conscience, elevation of character, and the esteem of the good.

From all that has been said it sufficiently appears, that although our fortune, our rank in life, our bodily organization, and many other circumstances of our condition, may not be materially subject to our control, yet that our health, our peace of mind, our estimation in the world, our place in the af-

fections of our friends, and our happiness in general, will inevitably be more or less regulated by the part which we act and the properties of our character. It is a serious consideration, and one which ought to have more weight in the world than it appears to possess, that all our actions and all our qualities have some certain tendency, and may greatly affect our well-being; that in every thing we do, we may be possibly laying a train of consequences, the operation of which may terminate only with our existence; and that a steady adherence to the rules of virtue and a conformity to the dictates of discretion, are the only securities we can provide for the happiness of our future destiny.

ESSAY VI.

ON

SOME OF THE CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF INDIVIDUAL CHARACTER.

WHATEVER subsequent circumstances may effect, it can scarcely be questioned, that all human beings come into the world with the germs of peculiar mental, as well as physical qualities. Attempts, indeed, have been made to resolve all mental varieties into the effects of dissimilar external circumstances, but with too little success to require any formal refutation. We are, then, naturally led to inquire, how are these original peculiarities occasioned? Whence arise those qualities of mind which constitute the individuality of men? There must be causes why the mind as well as the body of one man differs constitutionally from that of another; what are they? Perhaps all that can be said in

reply to these inquiries is, that the mental, like the bodily constitution of every individual, depends, in some inexplicable way, on the conjoint qualities of his parents. It depends, evidently, not on the qualities of one of the parents only, but on those of both. A moment's reflection will teach us, that the individuality of any human being, that ever existed, was absolutely dependant on the union of one particular man with one particular woman. If either the husband or the wife had been different, a different being would have come into the world. For the production of the individual called Shakespeare, it was necessary that his father should marry the identical woman whom he did marry. Had he selected any other wife, the world would have had no Shakespeare. He might have had a son, but that son would have been an essentially different individual; he would have been the same neither in mental nor physical qualities; he would have been placed in a different position amongst mankind, and subject to the operation of different circumstances.

It seems highly probable also, that if a marriage had taken place between the same male and female either at an earlier or a later period of their lives, the age at which they came together would have affected the identity of the progeny. If they had been married, for instance, in the year 1810, their eldest son would not be the same being as if they had been married ten years sooner. It may be remarked, too, that not only the time at which persons are married, but their mode of living, and their habits generally, as they have the power to affect the physical constitution of their progeny, may also affect the constitution of their minds, and occasion beings to be brought into the world absolutely different from those who would have seen the light under other circumstances.

With regard to physical conformation, every one knows that the face and figure are frequently transmitted from parents to their offspring. Sometimes the father's form and lineaments seem to predominate, sometimes the mother's, and sometimes there is a variety produced unlike either of the parents;

but by what principles these proportions and modifications are regulated, it is impossible to ascertain. The transmission of mental qualities is not, perhaps, equally apparent, but it is equally capricious. In some cases we see the characteristics of the parents perpetuated in their offspring, and in other cases no resemblance is to be discovered. The passions and temper appear to be frequently inherited; and although the proneness of children to imitation may partly account for the appearance, it cannot be admitted as a complete explanation, since the same spirit will manifest itself where parents and children have never lived together. The resemblance between their intellectual properties is seldom equally striking. In these, though there is no reason to suppose that they are not equally transmissible, there is at least less room for imitation. It is a common remark, that the sons of eminent men are themselves rarely conspicuous for talents; and yet, on the other hand, intellectual characteristics are sometimes known to run through whole families.

We have already intimated, that both the mental and physical constitution seem to depend on the united qualities of both the parents; not solely, however, for we every day see phenomena both of mind and body, which we can refer only to inexplicable accidents. Such are idiotism and mal-organization. The instances which may be cited of dull children being the offspring of parents, both of whom have been remarkable for quickness of intellect, present no greater difficulty than analogous instances with regard to corporeal qualities. It is as easily conceivable that two peculiar constitutions, which separately occasioned or were attended by intellectual quickness, may produce the reverse in the offspring, as that a fair child may be born of parents both of whom have dark complexions.

These cursory observations naturally lead us to reflect on the long chain of consequences of which the marriage of two persons may be the first link; and what an important influence such an union may have on human affairs. If two men and two

women founded a colony, by removing to some uninhabited district or island, where they were cut off from all intercourse with the rest of their species; the whole train of subsequent events in that colony to the end of time would depend on the manner in which they paired. If the older man married the older woman, a different train of affairs, it is manifest, would ensue, from that which would take place if the older man married the younger woman. In the first case, the offspring of the marriage would be totally different individuals from those which would have been brought into the world in the second case. They would think, feel, and act, in a widely different manner, and not a single event depending on human action would be precisely the same as any event in the other case.

As a farther illustration, it may not be devoid of amusement to trace the consequences which would have ensued, or rather which would have been prevented, had the father of some eminent character formed a different matrimonial connection. Suppose the father

of Bonaparte had married any other lady than the one who was actually destined to become his mother. Agreeably to the tenor of the preceding observations, it is obvious that Bonaparte himself would not have appeared in the world. The affairs of France would have fallen into different hands, and have been conducted in another manner. The measures of the British cabinet, the debates in parliament, the subsidies to foreign powers, the battles by sea and land, the marches, and countermarches, the wounds, deaths, and promotions, the fears, and hopes, and anxieties of a thousand individuals, would all have been different. The speculations of those writers and speakers who employed themselves in discussing these various subjects, and canvassing the conduct of this celebrated man, would not have been called forth. The train of ideas in every mind interested in public affairs would not have been the same. Pitt would not have made the same speeches, nor Fox the same replies. Lord Byron's poetry would have wanted some splendid passages. The Duke of Wellington might

have still been plain Arthur Wellesley. Mr. Warden would not have written his book, nor the Edinburgh critic his review of it; nor could the author of this essay have availed himself of his present illustration. The imagination of the reader will easily carry him through all the various consequences to soldiers and sailors, tradesmen and artizans, printers and booksellers, downward, through every gradation of society. In a word, when we take into account these various consequences, and the thousand ways in which the mere intelligence of Bonaparte's proceedings, and of the measures pursued to counteract them, influenced the feelings, the speech, and the actions of mankind, it is scarcely too much to say, that the single circumstance of Bonaparte's father marrying as he did, has more or less affected almost every individual in Europe, as well as a numerous multitude in the other quarters of the globe.

We see from the preceding glance, what an important share an individual may have in modifying the course of events, and how his influence may extend, in some way or

other, through the minutest ramifications of society. Yet amidst all this influence, we may also perceive the operation of general causes; of those principles of the mind common to all individuals, and of the physical circumstances by which they are surrounded. The individual character itself, indeed, partly receives its tone and properties from general causes, and much of the re-action which it exerts may be, in an indirect sense, ascribed to them. Thus, although the marriage of Bonaparte's father and mother, the connection of those particular persons, was the cause of his existence, and of many of the peculiarities by which he was distinguished, yet his character and conduct were in no small degree moulded by the spirit of the age. There are many general causes, it is obvious, which would have operated although any given person had never come into the world. There is a certain progress or course of affairs, that holds on, amidst all the various impressions, the checks, and the impulses, which it receives from individual character. If Bonaparte had never existed,

the nations of the earth would, in all likelihood, have been in much the same relative situation as they are, and, at all events, they would have made similar advances in political knowledge. The violence of the French Revolution would probably have been directed by some other ambitious leader against the states of Europe; it might have lasted nearly the same time, and subsided in a similar way. But although the general result might have been in many respects similar, the train of political events would have been altogether different; there would have been quite a different mass of materials for the future historian.

The remark may be extended, with still more certainty, to almost all the arts and sciences. Composed as their history necessarily is of the achievements of individuals, their advancement is the result of general causes, and independent in a certain sense on individual character. The inventions of printing and gunpowder, the discovery of the virtues of the loadstone, and even the inductive logic of Bacon, were sure to mark

the progress of human affairs, and were not owing to the mere personal qualities, nor necessarily bound to the destiny of those who promulgated them to the world. The discoveries of modern astronomy would doubtless have been ultimately attained, although such a person as Sir Isaac Newton had never seen the light; but they would not have been attained in the same way, nor perhaps at the same period. The science, it is probable, would have been extremely dissimilar in the detail, in the rapidity of its progress, and the order of its discoveries, while there is every reason to think it would have been much the same in its final result.

ESSAY VII.

ON

THE VICISSITUDES OF LIFE.

ALTHOUGH the events of our lives appear in the retrospect naturally enough connected with each other, yet if we compare two widely distant periods of the past, we shall often find them so discordant as to excite our surprise that the same being should have been placed in circumstances so essentially dissimilar. And if we could foresee some of the circumstances of our future lives, it would frequently appear quite out of the limits of possibility that we should be brought into them. Our present state would seem so full of insurmountable obstacles to such a change, that we could not form a conjecture by what instrumentality it was to be effected; we could not conceive

how the current of our destiny was to be so strangely diverted from its original course, nor how the barriers, which circumscribe our condition, were to be so entirely overthrown. But time gradually elaborates apparent impossibilities into very natural and consistent events. A friend is lost by death; a rival is removed from the sphere of competition; a superior falls and leaves a vacancy in society to be filled up; a series of events renders a measure advisable, of which a few years before we never dreamed; new circumstances bring around us new persons; novel connections open fresh prospects; objects before unknown excite passions before dormant, and rouse talents of which we were scarcely conscious; and our whole ideas and feelings varying and keeping pace with these revolutions, we are at length brought quite naturally into the very condition, which a few years ago seemed utterly irreconcilable with our position in the world and our relations to society. Many circumstances of our lives would appear like dreams, if we were abruptly thrown into

them, without perceiving the succession of events by which we came there. We should feel like the poor man in the Arabian Tales, who, while under the influence of a sleeping-draught, was divested of his clothes, and attired like a prince, and on awaking was strangely perplexed to find himself surrounded by all the outward appendages of royalty, and by a crowd of attendants who treated him as their monarch. It is the gradual developement of events, their connection and dependance on each other, and the corresponding changes in our views, which give the character of reality to actual life, as they confer it on the fictions of imagination. A succession of trivial changes carries the mind without abruptness to a wide distance from its former station, as a staircase conducts us to a lofty eminence by a series of minute elevations. Hence it is that men seldom suffer those extreme sensations from a change of circumstances which we are sometimes led to expect. Persons in low life are apt to think that the splendour, to which a man of their own class has raised

himself by industry and talents, must teem with uninterrupted enjoyment; that the contrast of his former lowliness with his present elevation must be a perennial spring of pleasurable emotion. It may indeed occasionally yield him gratifying reflections, but it is seldom in his power to feel the full force of the difference. It is not in nature that at one and the same time he should feel ardent admiration of splendour and familiarity with it; the panting desire for an object and the satisfied sense of enjoyment. He cannot combine at the same moment the possession of the feelings of two remote periods of his life, so as alternately to pass from one to the other, and revel in the full rapture of the contrast. No power of imagination can present him at once with two vivid landscapes of his mental condition at two different junctures, so as to enable him to bring into distinct comparison all their lights, and shades, and colours. The hand of time has been constantly at work to wear out the impressions of his past existence. While he has been led from one

vicissitude to another, from one state of mind to a different state, almost all the peculiarities of his original views and feelings have been successively dropped in his progress, till it has become an effort, if not an impossibility, to recollect them with any sort of clearness and precision.

The same revolution of feeling takes place when a man sinks into adversity, although memory perhaps is then more active and tenacious. A wonder is sometimes expressed, that one who has been unfortunate in the world should be able to retain so much cheerfulness amidst the recollection of former times, which must press on his mind; times when friends thronged around him, when every eye seemed to greet him with pleasure, and every object to share his satisfaction. Now destitute, forsaken, obscure, how is it that he is not overpowered by the contrast? There are moments, it cannot be doubted, when he acutely feels the transition, but this cannot be the ordinary state of his mind. Many of his views having been displaced by others, his feelings having

gradually conformed to his circumstances, and his attention being occupied with present objects, he has not that oppressive, habitual sense of the change, which a mere looker-on is apt to suppose. An indifferent observer, indeed, is often more powerfully struck with the contrast than the subject of it, not having to look at the former state through all the intermediate ideas and emotions, and being occupied only with the difference in external appearances. He contrasts (if we may have recourse to our former figure) only the base and the summit of the tower, while the staircase which connects them is concealed from his view.

It is certain that men frequently bear calamities much better than they themselves would have previously expected. In misfortunes which are of gradual growth, every change contracts and reduces their views, and prepares them for another; and they at length find themselves involved in the gloom of adversity without any violent transition. How many have there been, who, while basking in the smiles of fortune, and revel-

ling in the luxuries of opulence, would have been completely overpowered by a revelation of their future doom; yet when the vicissitudes of life have brought them into those circumstances, they have met their misfortunes with calmness and resignation. The records of the French Revolution abound with instances of extraordinary fortitude in those from whom it could be least expected, and who, a few years before, would probably have shrunk with horror from the bare imagination of their own fate. Women, as well as men, were seen to perish on the scaffold without betraying the least symptom of fear.

Even when calamity suddenly assails us, it is remarkable how soon we become familiarized with our novel situation. After the agony of the first shock has subsided, the mind seems to relinquish its hold on its former pleasures, to call in its affections from the various objects on which they had fixed themselves, and to endeavour to concentrate them on the few solaces remaining. By the force of perpetual and intense rumi-

nation, the rugged and broken path, by which the imagination passes from its present to its former state, is worn smooth and rendered continuous; and the aspect of surrounding objects becoming familiar, loses half the horror lent to it by the first agitated survey.

If it be thus true, that men in general bear calamities much better than they themselves would have expected, and that affliction brings along with it a portion of its own antidote, it is a fact which may serve to cheer us in the hour of gloomy anticipation. To reflect, that what would be agony to us in our present state of mind, with our present views, feelings, and associations, may at a future time prove a very tolerable evil, because the state of our mind will be different; that in the greatest misfortunes which may befal us, we shall probably possess sufficient strength and equanimity to bear the burden of our calamity, may be of some use in dispelling those melancholy forebodings which are apt to disturb the short period of life. It may lead us to more cheerful views of human existence.

There are few men of reflection to whose minds the fragility of human happiness has not been forcibly suggested by the very instances in which that happiness appears in its brightest colours. They have hung over it as over the early flowret of spring, which the next blast may destroy. As the lovely bride, blooming with health and animated with love and hope, has passed by in the day of her triumph, they have contrasted the transitory happiness of the hour with the long train of disappointments and calamities, diseases and deaths with which the most fortunate life is familiar, and many of which inevitably spring from the event which the beautiful creature before them, unconscious of all but the immediate prospect, is welcoming with a heart full of happiness and a countenance radiant with smiles. She seems a victim, on whom a momentary illumination has fallen only to be followed by deeper gloom. "Ah!" said a poor emaciated but still youthful woman, as she was standing at the door of her cottage while a gay bridal party were returning from church, "they

little think what they are about. I was left a widow with two children at the age of twenty-one."

It was in the same spirit that Gray wrote his Ode on the Prospect of Eton College. After describing the sports of the schoolboys in strains familiar to every reader, he makes a natural and beautiful transition to their future destiny.

Alas! regardless of their doom,
The little victims play!
No sense have they of ills to come,
Nor care beyond to-day;
Yet see how all around them wait,
The ministers of human fate,
And black misfortune's baleful train!
Ah! show them where in ambush stand,
To seize their prey, the murd'rous band!
Ah! tell them they are men.

In the indulgence of such reflections, however, it is to be remembered that we are contrasting distant events of life, bringing together extreme situations, of which to pass suddenly from one to the other might be intolerable anguish, and that we are suppressing all the circumstances which lie

between, and prepare a comparatively easy and gradual transition.

It is evident from the tenor of the preceding observations, that most of the intense pleasures and poignant sorrows of mankind must be experienced in passing from one condition to another, not in any permanent state; and that the intensity of the feeling will materially depend on the suddenness of the change.

On comparing the condition of a peasant and a peer, we cannot perhaps perceive much superiority of happiness in either. The ideas and feelings of the peasant are adjusted to the circumstances by which he is surrounded, and the coarseness of his fare and the homeliness of his dwelling excite no emotions of uneasiness. The notions of the peer are equally well adjusted to the pomp and refinements of rank and affluence. Luxurious dainties and splendid decorations, courteous deference and vulgar homage, are too familiar to raise any peculiar emotions of pleasure. But if a poor man rises to affluence, or a rich man sinks into poverty,

such circumstances are no longer neutral. The former feels delight in his new acquisitions, and the latter is pained by the want of his habitual luxuries and accustomed splendour. In the same manner that a substance may feel cold to one hand and warm to another, according to the different temperatures to which they have been antecedently exposed, so any rank or situation in life may yield pleasure or pain according to the previous condition of the person who is placed in it.

Hence we may perceive the error of such moralists as contend, that fame, wealth, power, or any other acquisition, is not worth pursuit, because those who are in possession of it are not happier than their fellow creatures. They may not indeed be happier, but this by no means proves, that the object is not worth pursuing, since there may be much pleasure, not only in the chase, but in the novelty of the acquisition. The fortune, which a man acquires by some successful effort, may not after a while afford him more gratification than his former moderate com-

petence; but in order to estimate its value, we must take into account all the pleasurable emotions which would flow in upon him until a perfect familiarity with his new circumstances had established itself in his mind.

Such moralists seem to forget, that man, by the necessity of his nature, must have some end, which he can pursue with ardour; that to be without aim and object is to be miserable; that the necessary business of life requires, on the part of many, an ardent aspiration after wealth, power, and reputation; and that it is not the pursuits themselves, but the vices with which they may be connected, that are proper objects of reprobation. It is, in fact, by yielding to the passions and principles of his constitution, within proper limits, and under proper restrictions, not by the vain attempt to suppress them, that man promotes the happiness of himself and society.

ESSAY VIII.

ON THE

VARIETY OF INTELLECTUAL PURSUITS.

THE various arts and sciences may be compared to the pictures in a large gallery. Every one who has passed through one of these magnificent repositories, knows how vain is the attempt to understand the subject, and estimate the merits, of all the specimens of art exposed to his view, in the short space of time usually allotted to the survey. As he throws his glances around, his eye is dazzled and his mind confused by the diversity of representations, and he at length finds it expedient to limit his attention to a few, which may have been pointed out by particular circumstances or general celebrity. In the same manner, the subjects of knowledge are too numerous and com-

plicated, and human life far too short, to allow even the highest intellect to embrace the whole. As we look through the vast accumulation of science, our minds would be oppressed by the various objects which present themselves, did we not take them in detail, and concentrate our observation on a part. Those, therefore, who wish to excel in intellectual pursuits, find it necessary to direct their principal efforts to some particular science or branch of literature. They thus escape the perplexity and superficialness of such as dissipate their attention on a multitude of subjects, and are far more likely to enlarge the boundaries of knowledge than by a more indiscriminate application. This division of labour in the intellectual world, however, is not without its disadvantages. As the artizan, who is chained down to the drudgery of one mechanical operation, is a much inferior being to the savage, who is continually thrown upon the resources of his own mind in novel circumstances; who has to devise and execute plans of aggression and defence, to extricate himself from diffi-

culties and encounter dangers, and who thus acquires a wonderful versatility of talent; so the man, who has devoted himself to one science, often loses by a comparison with him who has suffered his mind to wander over all the various and beautiful regions of knowledge. What the former gains in accuracy and nicety of tact, he loses in copiousness of ideas and comprehensiveness of views; and thus it sometimes appears in the intellectual, as well as in the civil world, as if the perfection of individual character must be sacrificed to the general progress of society. Although there is this tendency in the rapid advance of knowledge, and although a concentrated attention is requisite to success, yet it is by no means necessary that men should devote themselves exclusively to their favourite subjects. The sciences are so connected, if by nothing else, at least by the general logical principles pervading the whole, that they throw light on each other; and he has the fairest chance of success in any one career, who starts well furnished with general information, while he possesses

the only means of saving himself from becoming an intellectual artizan.

Another disadvantage attending the multiplicity of knowledge, and the consequent division of intellectual labour, lies in forming classes of men having little fellow-feeling, inasmuch as they cannot readily enter with interest into each other's darling pursuits. The mathematician hears of a new species of plants with all possible apathy, and the antiquarian scarcely gives himself the trouble of inquiring after the most brilliant discoveries of the chemist. In proportion, too, as a science becomes complex and extensive, requiring minute application, it is removed from general participation and sympathy. It cannot be expected that the various acquirements of scientific men should be duly estimated and relished by that numerous body of people not destitute of mental culture, who come under the denomination of general readers. Almost all the sciences are defended by a host of peculiar ideas and technicalities in language, which effectually bar the approach of such as have

not gone through a regular process of initiation. The acutest mind might expend its efforts in vain on subjects of which it did not comprehend the terms. Pope has well described the effect which would ensue from a sudden plunge into mathematical science.

> " Full in the midst of Euclid dip at once,
> " And petrify a genius to a dunce."

There is, however, a large class of subjects, in which almost all men of cultivated minds can take an equal interest; subjects which relate to man himself, and chiefly to those phenomena of his nature which lie exposed to common observation. The elementary knowledge required in topics relating to morals, manners, and taste, is possessed by all, the terms in which they are treated of form the common language of daily intercourse, and every mind feels itself competent to pronounce on the positions in the expression of which they are employed. That the sum of the squares of the two sides of a right-angled triangle is equal to the square of the hypotenuse, can be fully comprehended by

such only as have gone through a previous course of instruction; but every one can understand, on the first enunciation, that it is ridiculous in a country girl to affect the fine lady, and base in a man to fawn on the minions of power. There are also other and stronger reasons why, while the subjects alluded to attract so much, many of the sciences attract so small a portion of general interest. The latter address themselves to the intellect alone. They are fraught with none of those interesting associations of hope, and joy, and sympathy, which cling to the productions of the poet, the moralist, and the historian. They teem not with passion and feeling; they call not into play the sensibilities of our nature; they make no appeal to the experience of our hearts. They cannot therefore appear otherwise than dry and devoid of attraction to those whose views are circumscribed by the ordinary affairs of life, who have never leapt the boundaries which encircle the regions of abstract truth and recondite knowledge, nor learned to invest them with those pleasurable associations, which a

vigorous effort to master their difficulties has created in others.

It may be remarked, however, that this want of the power of awakening the feelings, this defect of vital warmth in the abstruser sciences, is not without its advantages. Some of the finest pleasures of our nature are those of pure intellect, without any mixture of human passion. When the mind has been agitated by the cares of the world, irritated by folly, or disgusted by vice, it is an attainment of no despicable importance to be able for a while to divest itself of its connection with mankind, by taking refuge in the abstractions of science, where there is no object to drag it back to the events of the past, or revive the fever of its sensibility. It is such a welcome transition as we experience in passing from the burning rays of a vertical sun to the delicious coolness of a grotto.

We may gather from the preceding observations, that in works of polite literature, more especially works of imagination, too much care cannot be employed in avoiding the peculiar characteristics of science. To

be generally interesting, their subjects and phraseology should carry along with them their own light; and their success will also greatly depend on the frequency and effect with which they appeal to the feelings possessed in common by all well-informed readers. One of the most noted instances of the neglect of both these points is Dr. Darwin's poem of the Botanic Garden, which, though it contains passages of dazzling splendour, fails to interest, because it is loaded with the obscurities of scientific nomenclature and allusion; and full of topics, vast and magnificent, but not within the range of ordinary feeling; bright and imposing, but without warmth and vitality.

The same principles will also serve to explain why poems, founded on the superstitions and manners of other nations, excite a comparatively weak and transient interest. In the first place, a poem of this class must necessarily be a learned poem, and it requires an effort on the part of the reader to enter into its allusions, and comprehend the learning which it exhibits; secondly, the associa-

tions and feelings ascribed to the characters can never lay hold of his mind with the same power as those which spring from indigenous customs and superstitions. No part of the mythology of the Curse of Kehama could ever excite, in the soul of an Englishman, so profound an interest as the appearance of Banquo's ghost, in the tragedy of Macbeth. In the one case we may admire the skill of the poet, and even imagine the emotions of his characters; in the other, the emotions are our own. The Lalla Rookh of Moore is another example in point. The poet has skilfully availed himself of a variety of oriental illustrations, calculated to delight the fancy, but they do not fasten on the mind like allusions to familiar objects; and it may be questioned whether his pretty eastern princesses, surrounded with a profusion of birds, and butterflies, and flowers, have enabled him to charm his readers as he would have done by the description of a lovely Englishwoman, with English manners, and amidst English scenery. The passions of human nature are no doubt much the same

all over the world, and a vivid representation of them will be attractive under all the modifications of different habits and manners; but it will be more vivid and more attractive when it appeals to our sympathy through the medium of our usual associations.

The differences already pointed out between works of science and those of morality and imagination, necessarily give rise to different kinds of reputation. The fame of a scientific author is in some measure confined to the circle of those, who understand the subject; or, if it overstep this limit, it becomes known only as a bare fact on the testimony of others. The fame of a poet, or a moralist, on the contrary, pervades all society, not as a matter of fact, but a matter of feeling. It is not merely the echo of his merits that reaches us, but it is his own voice to which we listen. His noble sentiments, his beautiful images, his brilliant wit, his felicitous expressions, mingle themselves with our intellectual being, and constitute a part of the public mind.

Newton and Shakespeare are perhaps

equally illustrious, but certainly possess different kinds of reputation. Newton can be deservedly appreciated only by those few, who can track his gigantic advances in science; to the world at large he is a man who has made discoveries, wonderful enough, but of which they can form no adequate conception. Shakespeare, on the other hand, is read and admired by all; they speak in his words, and think in his thoughts. Not only the fame, but the manifestations of his genius live in their recollection, and his sentiments and expressions rise spontaneously as their own. Newton shines to the world like a remote though brilliant star. Shakespeare, like the sun, which warms mankind as well as enlightens them.

ESSAY IX.

ON

PRACTICAL AND SPECULATIVE ABILITY.

In the intercourse of the world every one must have observed two kinds of talent, so distinct from each other as to admit of different appellations, although frequently united in the same person. One has reference exclusively to the operations of the mind, and may be called speculative ability; the other has reference to the application of knowledge, or to action, and may be called practical ability. Speculative ability may be seen in the composition of a poem, the solution of a problem, the formation of a chain of reasoning, or the invention of a story. In these performances nothing is required but an exertion of the mental

powers; they are purely internal operations, and although they may be assisted by the employment of external means, it would be possible to carry them on without it.

Practical ability may be seen in every department of active life. It consists in the dexterous application of means for the attainment of ends. The term may be extended to every sort of skill, whether exerted in important or trivial matters; but it is here meant to designate, not so much any technical dexterity, or that which a man evinces in the employment of his physical powers on inanimate objects, as that higher skill by which he directs the talents and passions of his fellow-creatures to the accomplishment of his purposes, and seizes the opportunities of action presented by successive events; and which enables him to conduct himself with propriety and success, in any circumstances into which he may be thrown.

The two kinds of ability here pointed out must exist more or less in every individual, but they are often combined in very un-

equal proportions. A high degree of speculative is frequently found in conjunction with a low degree of practical ability, and conversely, the practical talents are sometimes superior to the speculative. Men, who have exhibited the greatest powers of mind in their writings, have been found altogether inefficient in active life, and incapable of availing themselves of their own wisdom. With comprehensive views and a capacity for profound reasoning on human affairs, they have felt bewildered in actual emergencies; keen and close observers of the characters, the failings, and the accomplishments of others, they have not had the power of conforming their own conduct to their theoretical standard of excellence. Giants in the closet, they have proved but children in the world. This destitution of practical talent in men of fine intellect often excites the wonder of the crowd. They seem to expect that he, who has shown powers of mind bespeaking an almost all-comprehensive intelligence, and who has perhaps poured a flood of light

on the path of action to be pursued by others, should, as a matter of course, be able to achieve any enterprize and master any difficulties himself. Such expectations, however, are unreasonable and ill-founded. Excellence in one thing does not necessarily confer excellence in all, or even in things requiring the exercise of the same faculties. Both practical and speculative ability are no doubt modifications of mental power; but one, on that account, by no means implies the other, any more than dexterity in reefing a sail involves the art of leaping a five-barred gate, though they are both instances of physical skill.

It would be just as reasonable, indeed, to expect that a good sailor, should be necessarily a clever horseman, as that a man of fine speculative powers should in consequence be also a man of practical talent. The want of practical ability then, in such a man, may arise simply from an exclusive attention to processes purely mental. Where the mind is entirely absorbed by the relations of science, or where its powers are

habitually concentrated on its own creations, it is perfectly natural that the arts of active life should not be acquired. To a man so occupied, common objects and occurrences have little interest, and it is with effort that he commands his attention sufficiently to avoid egregious mistakes, and to gain a passable dexterity in things which all the world are expected to know and to perform. The understanding, moreover, that is accustomed to pursue a regular and connected train of ideas, becomes in some measure incapacitated for those quick and versatile movements which are learned in the commerce of the world, and are indispensable to those who act a part in it. Deep thinking and practical talents require indeed habits of mind so essentially dissimilar, that while a man is striving after the one he will be unavoidably in danger of losing the other. The justness of these observations might be supported, if necessary, by a reference to the characters of a number of men distinguished by their literary and scientific accomplishments. It will be sufficient to adduce the

instance of the celebrated author of the Wealth of Nations. Few writers have carried profound and systematic thinking farther, or attained more comprehensive views of human policy; and the effects on his character, as might have been anticipated, were seen in the want of the proper qualifications for bustle and business. "He was certainly," says his biographer, "not fitted for the general commerce of the world, or for the business of active life. The comprehensive speculations with which he had been occupied from his youth, and the variety of materials which his own invention continually supplied to his thoughts, rendered him habitually inattentive to familiar objects, and to common occurrences; and he frequently exhibited instances of absence, which have scarcely been surpassed by the fancy of La Bruyere. Even in company he was apt to be engrossed with his studies; and appeared, at times, by the motion of his lips, as well as by his looks and gestures, to be in the fervour of composition."*

* An Account of the Life and Writings of Dr. Adam Smith, by Dugald Stewart.

The want of practical talent, in other cases, may be accounted for by a certain gentleness, reservedness, or timidity of disposition, which causes its possessor to shrink from the encounter of his fellow-creatures. Whatever it proceeds from, whether it is the effect of natural constitution, weakness of nerves, delicacy of organization, or the faulty associations of early life, it is certain that this disposition is frequently the accompaniment of superior genius. We are told that Virgil possessed it in a remarkable degree; Addison seems to have had a similar temperament; and it was the prominent weakness of Cowper. In the latter indeed it assumed a decidedly morbid character, and appears to have been either the cause of his insanity or a strong symptom of its approach. To such an extreme did it oppress him, that, according to his own declaration, a public exhibition of himself was mortal poison to his feelings.

Where this imperfection of character exists, it must be an insuperable obstacle to success in active life. That power of in-

tellect, nevertheless, which is thus circumscribed, is not destroyed. Power, whether of body or mind, has always, an unconquerable tendency to exert itself; and he, who is not endowed with the energy of temperament necessary to bring his intellect into play amidst the conflict of worldly interests, will turn its whole force to those pursuits in which his timidity will be no incumbrance. Thus both Addison and Cowper, although they were ill calculated to make a figure when the manifestation of their talents depended on personal action, could accomplish more than most of their species, when they entered the free field of composition, unimpeded by the restraints of external circumstances. The character of Addison, indeed, may be selected as a striking instance of admirable speculative powers, combined with a deficiency of practical talent, in circumstances favourable to its cultivation. By the force of his genius, without the aid of hereditary fortune or family connections, he rose to an important office in the state, and had every opportu-

nity of qualifying himself to discharge its duties with credit and effect. The course of his education, and the career through which he subsequently passed, seemed to combine whatever was necessary to form and direct the powers of a practical statesman; yet, notwithstanding all his advantages, and all his accomplishments, he was found incompetent to fill the situation to which his general abilities, rather than any obvious fitness in the eyes of others, may be presumed to have raised him. "In the year 1717 he rose," says Dr. Johnson, "to his highest elevation, being made secretary of state. For this employment he might be justly supposed qualified by long practice of business, and by his regular ascent through other offices; but expectation is often disappointed; it is universally confessed that he was unequal to the duties of his place. In the house of commons he could not speak, and therefore was useless to the defence of the government. In the office, says Pope, he could not issue an order without losing his time in quest of fine expressions. What

he gained in rank, he lost in credit; and finding by experience his own inability, was forced to solicit his dismission with a pension of fifteen hundred pounds a year."*

It is perhaps quite as common to meet with the reverse of the phenomenon which we have been considering; to find considerable practical talents combined with comparatively feeble powers of speculation. The language and conduct of men of business, both in private life and in the administration of public affairs, frequently involve principles decidedly erroneous, and when brought to the test of scientific investigation, even palpably absurd; and yet it is almost as difficult to convince them of their error, and to place their minds in a position for viewing the subject aright, as to give an idea of colours to the blind. Hence it is years, and almost ages, before the discoveries of science and philosophy are adopted in practice. The habit of looking at present expedients, and forming hasty conclusions from superficial appearances, seems to incapacitate such

* Lives of the Poets.

men for raising their views to remote consequences, and tracing the operation of general principles. Their incapacity for mere intellectual processes, except of the simplest sort, is in truth as remarkable as the awkwardness of the philosopher in the active pursuits of life.

This superiority of their practical talents to their speculative powers may be explained on much the same grounds as the contrary case: it is occasioned by the exclusive application of their talents to business, and the intellectual habits thus created. We see in it another exemplification of the general principle, that a man will excel in that to which he lends the greatest attention. But there are some dispositions more qualified by nature for the business of the world than others. It has been already remarked, that the mind is frequently turned to speculative pursuits by constitutional timidity; and it is frequently determined to active pursuits by energy of temperament. Energy itself, without superiority of intellect, suffices to make a man of practical talent. It puts all

his faculties to their utmost stretch, and gives him a decided control over all who are less bold and resolute than himself. Intellectual ability is, in fact, only an inert instrument: it is passion which is the moving power, and which brings it into operation; and a small measure of understanding may often do more when urged on by strong passion, or a determined will, than an infinitely larger portion with no vigour to set it in motion.

There is another quality of mind, not exactly the same as energy but often combined with it, which has usually a large share in the composition of practical talent, and that is, the presence of mind, or self-possession, which enables a man at all times to employ his powers to advantage. Madame de Stäel in her delineation of Bonaparte, remarks with her usual sagacity, that it was rather because other men did not act upon him than because he acted upon them that he became their master. This power of not being acted upon by others gives a man a wonderful command over such as have less coolness

than himself; and the susceptibility of being acted upon unfits him who is extremely subject to it for success in active life.

To the qualities already mentioned, as entering into the composition of practical ability, we may add what is perhaps rather a habit than a natural property; a certain versatility of feeling as well as of intellect. A man of business, accustomed to pass rapidly from one thing to another, can enter with a proper degree of interest into any affair in which he finds himself engaged. He possesses a facility of transferring his attention and the exercise of his powers to successive objects, not only without distraction, but with proper confidence in himself; and from this property of his mind, together with the others already enumerated, he derives such a perfect command over his faculties as to bring them to bear with effect on every occasion.

Some of the highest functions which a man can be called to discharge obviously require a considerable degree of both practical and speculative ability. This remark applies

to the art of public speaking, which is materially indebted in its greatest excellence to grace of action, agreeable enunciation, skilful pliancy of tone, readiness of mind, acuteness and nicety of tact, boldness and self possession; while all the beauty and logical force of an oration are the result of speculative power. But a man of only moderate speculative talents will often make a popular orator by an imposing manner, a perfect command over his ideas and feelings, and a graceful use of his personal advantages: and on the other hand, a man devoid of all these, a man of no practical ability, without making his way through our senses by the charms of voice or gesture, and even without the aid of perfect expression, will astonish and delight us by the mere potency of his thoughts. It is the soul of the speaker that seizes upon his auditors without the intervention of external artifice.

There is a subordinate kind of practical ability, which consists in the easy and perfect management of ourselves in social intercourse. It may be termed ability of manner,

and seems to depend in a great measure on the same qualities as other kinds of practical ability. It is occasionally found in a very high degree without much power of understanding. The man, who has attained it, can conduct himself with propriety, and without embarrassment, in any company into which he happens to be thrown, and go through all the ceremonies of life with facility and grace. He has not only an instantaneous perception of what is proper to be said and done, on every occasion, but he has at command his language, his gestures, and even the expression of his countenance; so that he can always act up to his own sense of propriety, and exhibit to advantage whatever share he possesses of intellect and acquirements.

As one ingredient or accompaniment, or embellishment of ability of manner, we may mention that ready talent for conversation with which some are endowed, either by nature or education. Their ideas flow without effort, and clothe themselves in easy and appropriate language. Every thing around

them, all that they see and hear, seems to awaken their memory or imagination. They are always fertile in topics, and expression never deserts them.

It is not uncommon for men of eminent talents to want this ability of manner, and to evince a considerable degree of awkwardness and embarrassment in the interchange of civilities. Though they may have a delicate perception of what is proper, yet having neither the facility, which is acquired by practice, nor the self-possession of less susceptible minds, they fail to exemplify their own ideas of propriety. The presence of a number of their fellow-creatures appears to oppress them with a constraint, which fetters all their powers, particularly their powers of conversation. In vain do they task their minds for suitable topics of discourse. Their ideas seem to have vanished from their recollection, and their language is marked by hesitation and infelicity.

The character of Addison furnishes an illustration also of this part of our subject.

It appears, that all his commerce with society, and his intercourse with high life, had failed to give him the easy and unembarrassed carriage of a man of the world. According to Lord Chesterfield, he was the most timorous and awkward man that he ever saw. Dr. Johnson, who thinks this representation hyperbolical, nevertheless admits, that he was deficient in readiness of conversation, and that every testimony concurs to prove his having been oppressed by an improper and ungraceful timidity. That his taciturnity arose from constraint, and not from want of power, is decided by the testimony of those, who best knew him, to the attractive qualities of his conversation, when amongst his intimate friends. "Addison's conversation," says Pope, "had something in it more charming than I have found in any other man. But this was only when familiar: before strangers, or perhaps a single stranger, he preserved his dignity by a stiff silence."

Gray may be cited as another instance of the want of ability of manner, if reliance

is to be placed on the representation of Horace Walpole, who thus speaks of him in one of his letters: "I agree with you most absolutely in your opinion about Gray; he is the worst company in the world. From a melancholy turn, from living reclusely, and from a little too much dignity, he never converses easily. All his words are measured and chosen. His writings are admirable. He himself is not agreeable." In this representation, some ill-nature and exaggeration may be reasonably suspected, but the writer would scarcely have hazarded a portrait devoid of all resemblance to the original.

To these instances we may add the account given us of the manners of Adam Smith, by his biographer, Mr. Stewart: "In the company of strangers his tendency to absence, and perhaps still more his consciousness of that tendency, rendered his manner some what embarrassed; an effect which was probably not a little heightened by those speculative ideas of propriety, which his recluse habits tended at once to perfect in his

conception, and to diminish his power of realizing."

Although constraint or embarrassment, in the presence of others, must of itself impair a man's powers of conversation, other causes conspire to produce a deficiency of conversational talent in men of profound genius. It seems partly to arise from a want of versatility of mind, and from the nature of those relations by which their ideas are connected. Men of profundity are not versatile, because, from pursuing logical deductions and regular inventions, they grow accustomed to proceed with order and method. Their associations are of too strict a character to admit of rapid transitions from one subject to another; whereas the ideas of a man of the world, being connected by a thousand accidental ties, and superficial relations, are liable to be roused by any object or event which may present itself. What knowledge he possesses he has always at command; it may be of small amount, but his promptness at producing it frequently enables him to triumph over the philosopher, whose slow habits and

abstract associations form a sort of ponderous machinery, requiring to be methodically worked to raise his ideas from the depths of his mind. But on this particular subject it would be idle to expatiate, since the world is already in possession of the eloquent and philosophical explanation of Stewart. After illustrating "the advantages which the philosopher derives, in the pursuits of science, from that sort of systematic memory, which his habits of arrangement give him," he proceeds as follows:—

"It may however be doubted, whether such habits be equally favourable to a talent for agreeable conversation; at least for that lively, varied, and unstudied conversation, which forms the principal charm of a promiscuous society. The conversation, which pleases generally, must unite the recommendations of quickness, of ease, and of variety: and in all these three respects, that of the philosopher is apt to be deficient. It is deficient in quickness, because his ideas are connected by relations which occur only to an attentive and collected mind. It is

deficient in ease, because these relations are not the casual and obvious ones by which ideas are associated in ordinary memories; but the slow discoveries of patient and often painful exertion. As the ideas, too, which he associates together, are commonly of the same class, or at least are referred to the same general principles, he is in danger of becoming tedious by indulging himself in long and systematical discourses; while another, possessed of the most inferior accomplishments, by laying his mind completely open to impressions from without, and by accommodating continually the course of his own ideas, not only to the ideas which are started by his companions, but to every trifling and unexpected accident that may occur to give them a new direction, is the life and soul of every society into which he enters*.

To this may be added, that the philosopher can feel little interest in many of those events which occasion fervent emotion in the minds of ordinary people: and since to feel an in-

* Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind, vol. i, page 422, &c.

terest in any thing is to have the ideas excited, and the imagination awakened, his conversation will frequently fail in vivacity, because his feelings are not roused by a number of inconsiderable circumstances, about which others are vividly affected.

ESSAY X.

ON THE

MUTABILITY OF HUMAN FEELINGS.

MAN is a mutable being. Objects are in continual fluctuation around him, and his views, feelings, and faculties are subject to the same law. Let any one compare the state of his mind at two distant periods of his life, and he will perceive a revolution, not only in his external relations, but in his moral and mental being: he is no longer the same man; his purposes, motives, affections, and views of life have been the subjects of a change, gradual perhaps in its progress, but great in its consummation. The object which he once regarded with all the enthusiasm of feeling, which seemed to be the very sun of his existence, and the bare mention of which thrilled through his heart, has totally vanished from his thoughts. The prospect which formerly looked so enchanting is now

cold and cheerless to his eye. He looks back, and cannot refrain from wondering, that, on circumstances of so trifling a nature his heart should have wasted such excess of passion. As a plain mansion meets his mature eye in the building, which to his infant gaze wore the appearance of a stately palace, so he discerns nothing but insignificance in those pursuits, which once filled and inflamed his imagination with their importance. A livelier description of such a change of feeling cannot perhaps be found, than that which Lord Chesterfield has left us in a letter written a short time before his death: "I have run," says his Lordship, "the silly round of business and pleasure, and have done with them all. I have enjoyed all pleasures of the world, and consequently know their futility, and do not regret their loss. I appraise them at their real value, which is, in truth, very low: whereas those, that have not experienced, always overrate them. They only see their gay outside, and are dazzled with the glare; but I have seen behind the scenes: I have seen all the coarse

pullies and dirty ropes, which exhibit and move the gaudy machine; I have seen and smelt the tallow candles, which illuminate the whole decoration, to the astonishment and admiration of an ignorant audience. When I reflect back upon what I have seen, what I have heard, and what I have done, I can hardly persuade myself that all that frivolous hurry, and bustle, and pleasure of this world, had any reality; but I look upon all that has passed as one of the romantic dreams, which opium commonly occasions, and I do by no means desire to repeat the nauseous dose, for the sake of the fugitive dream."

But besides these more important mental revolutions, there are others of a subordinate character, less remarked and less remembered. What a variety of desires, and passions, and tones of feeling, the same individual passes through in the course of a week! What alternations of hope and fear, humility and exultation, gladness and melancholy! What a change in our views of life, as we look upon it through the transient *media*, which

successive passions rapidly interpose between the mind and its objects! Even the most uniform state is diversified by a train of little passions and desires, followed by disappointment or gratification; and, with many, the very days of the week and hours of the day have each their different sets of feelings and associations.

No stage or condition of life is free from that copious source of mental changes, the attainment of our desires. This principle of mutation runs through life, through every hour and every day, although it may attract our notice only on important occasions. The revolution of feeling will of course be proportioned to the intensity of desire with which we have pursued our object; and youth, as it is more liable to be inflamed and deluded by hope, will be peculiarly the season of such vicissitudes. In regard to almost every object of pursuit, we may say what the poet says of woman,

> "The lovely toy so fiercely sought
> "Hath lost its charm by being caught*."

* Lord Byron's Giaour.

Many of the changes of feeling already noticed are manifestly experienced without appearing in our actions: they are bubbles on the stream, which rise and disappear without any kind of consequences. Others prompt our actions without making any permanent difference in our habitual conduct. It is indeed astonishing what a number of various emotions may pass through a man's mind and sway his actions without affecting the permanent tone of his character, on which they seem to leave as little trace behind them as an arrow of its flight through the air. There are others of a third class, however, which produce a considerable effect on the tenor of his character and conduct. Perhaps the principal of these are the revolutions of mind in which its affections are transferred from one set of objects, or one pursuit, to another. In the lapse of time they must occur to every one; but although all are subject to them, it is by no means in an equal degree. While some preserve a steadiness of taste and purpose, not to be suddenly altered by any of the vicissitudes of life,

others bend to every impulse, and fluctuate with every variation; a mutability which, if not under the control of strong sense, will inevitably lead to inconsistency of character. Such men seem to possess a constant susceptibility of being inflamed with ardour towards any object which happens to strike the imagination. For a short time the chase is kept up with a vigour and enthusiasm, which amaze the ordinary class of mortals, and leave competition at a distance; but their preternatural energy soon relaxes, and ultimately dies away, till it is revived by some other caprice, and starts off in a new direction.

This fickleness of character is doubtless in many cases constitutional, but it is often promoted, if not engendered, by an imperfect education, which has suffered the youthful mind to form its most important associations by chance. Hence the man not only becomes variable in his moods, but suffers from the vacillation arising out of the simultaneous importunities of desires which are incompatible. Thrown in child-

hood amidst multiform characters and circumstances, his mind has been made up of impressions without any regulating principle to keep them in just subordination, or modify their effects. Happiness must be held on a precarious tenure by a man, who is thus subject to the opposite influence of inconsistent attractions, and who is continually liable to have his tranquillity ruffled and his purposes disturbed by some novel event or contact with some new character. With a mind full of associations which can be acted upon by impulses the most contrary, he is the slave of circumstances, which seem to snatch the guidance of his conduct out of his own hands, and impel him forward, till other events overpower their influence, and having usurped the same ascendancy exercise the same despotism. Such fickleness of character can be avoided only by acting on fixed principles and determinate aims, not to be abandoned in the transient humours which every day brings and every day sees expire. Man, amidst the fluctuations of his own feelings and

of passing events, ought to resemble the ship, which currents may carry and winds may impel from her course, but which amidst every deviation still presses onward to her port with unremitted perseverance. In the coolness of reflection, he ought to survey his affairs with a dispassionate and comprehensive eye, and having fixed on his plan, take the necessary steps to accomplish it, regardless of the temporary mutations of his mind, the monotony of the same track, the apathy of exhausted attention, or the blandishments of new projects.

The folly of sacrificing settled purposes to transient humours, cannot be kept too steadily in view. In a man of susceptible mind these moods of feeling often chase each other in rapid succession; and if he is also a wise man, it will powerfully restrain their influence on his actions, to reflect, that next month, or next week, or even to-morrow, he will experience nothing of the melancholy, or vexation, or ardour, or desire, which predominates to-day. He should therefore make his considerate determination

the fixed point round which his passions, and feelings, and humours might play, with as little power to move it as the clouds possess on the stedfastness of Skiddaw.

The place of such a consistent perseverance, as here described, is in many individuals supplied by a devoted attachment to some particular pursuit; and although this strong determination of the taste may cause absurdities in the character, it is perhaps on the whole conducive to happiness. A man with such a bias is surely happier than he who is perpetually subject to fickleness of taste and passion; or he who spends life in the vacuity arising from the want of a definite purpose. As instincts supply the place of knowledge, so does such a decided partiality produce many of the good effects of a perseverance in designs formed on mature and comprehensive reflection.

NOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS.

NOTE A (page 16.)

THIS argument is so ingeniously put in the following passage, which I met with after the publication of the first edition of the present work, that I am happy in the opportunity to present it to my readers, especially as it also coincides with the practical application of the doctrine in the sequel of this essay:

"One thing there is which, verily, I could never understand but to be altogether void of reason. That he who is thought to have taught something false and impious should be forced to recant, which if he do, he shall not be punished. To what purpose, I pray you, serves this practice? What good is there gotten, if for the avoiding of punishment, against his conscience, an heretic should recant his opinion? There is only one thing that may be alleged for it, *viz.*: that such as are possessed of the same error, and unknown perhaps, will do the like in their own hearts, yea, will counsel others to do the same. That opinion must needs have a very light impression, which can so easily be plucked out of men's mindes. Have we no reason to suspect that such a recantation is rather for fear of punishment than from the heart? Will there not rather much heart-burning by this means arise, if

the magistrates shall seem not only to kill the body, but to plot the ruine of the soul? Are we, indeed, so ill furnished with weapons to vanquish error, as to be forced to defend ourselves with a lye, to put our trust in recantations made through fear? But some may say, this is not what we desire, to force men to any kind of recantation, but that an heretic may acknowledge his error, not so much with his mouth as with his heart. This were excellent, indeed, if these could bring him to it. But what work is there for threats or blandishments in this case? These have some power, indeed, to prevail with the will, but thy business is with the understanding: it is changed neither by threats, nor flatteries, nor allurements. These cannot cause that what formerly seemed true should now seem false, though the party may very much desire to change his judgment, which, if it seem a new and wonderful thing to thee, I shall not need many arguments to convince thee of the truth thereof. You suppose that a man may change his judgment when he will, without any new reason to persuade him to think otherwise. I deny that he can do so. Make you, therefore, an experiment upon yourself, and see if you can for the least space of time draw yourself to think otherwise than you do in the question between us, so as to make yourself believe as I do, 'that a man cannot change his judgment when he pleases,' without question you shall finde that you cannot do it. But take heed you mistake not an imagination for a persuasion, for nothing hinders but that thou mayest imagine what thou wilt. I pray thee likewise to consider again, that in case thou fear any thing, as for ex-

ample, lest any business may not have a good issue, lest somethinge should come to pass much against thy minde, so that thou canst not sleep for the trouble thereof, thou need but change thy opinion concerning such a thing, so as to hope that all will be well, and thy trouble shall be at an end. O most easie and ready medicine to take away the greatest part of that trouble of minde which men sustain in this life! O short philosophy! if whatsoever evil a man shall fear may betide him, he may believe (if he will) that it will not come to pass; whatsoever molests a man, because he takes it to be an evil, (when as oft times there is no evil in such a thing,) he may persuade himself when he pleases that it is not an evil. But experience shows that none of these things can be."—Satan's Stratagems, by Acontius or Aconzio, translated by John Goodwin, 1648.

I am indebted for the above extract to the Monthly Repository, No. 188, page 458.

NOTE B (page 71.)

There are people in the world, and people even of intelligence, who are afraid of associating with others of opposite opinions to their own, or of reading books in which such opinions are maintained; and they justify their fears by alleging, that they wish to avoid the contamination of their minds; that no one can associate with free-thinkers without having his faith shaken, or with republicans without some inroads on his veneration for monarchy. It is true enough, as we have had occasion to observe in the text, that our opinions are

greatly influenced by our associates; but it is those opinions only which have been instilled into our minds without any examination on our part, or which have never assumed a distinct and definite form; which we have never analysed, and which we cannot trace from any rational premises. Whatever therefore may be said in justification of such fears on the part of the illiterate, no man who professes to think for himself, or to be an inquirer after truth, can consistently be afraid of any arguments, any opinions. To him they are subjects of examination, and he rejoices if he finds in them a new principle. They can come to form part of his own opinions only by their clearness and cogency. Before any proposition can be received into his mind as true, it must appear to him logically deduced from undeniable premises. What is there, therefore, in any opinion, which can cause him a moment's alarm? If it comes before him without proper evidence it makes no impression: if it is supported by irresistible proof he has gained a new truth. What possible evil then can arise from subjecting his mind to the operation of any arguments whatever?

It is different in the case of the imagination, or, in other words, with ideas connected by other than logical relations, with those mere conceptions which are continually rising in the mind. The evil of a false argument is not in its being perceived by the understanding, but in its being regarded as true: hence the perception of its fallacy annihilates its influence, and, however often it may occur to the recollection, it is perfectly harmless: but in the case of horrid or disgusting images, it is the mere conception of them which

constitutes the evil, and the most thorough insight into their character cannot remedy the mischief.

Hence, while he who has formed his conclusions for himself, and clearly sees their dependance on indubitable evidence, is unaffected in his opinions amidst the thickest warfare of sophistry, and comes unharmed out of the contest, a man of the most virtuous disposition and the purest intentions is at the mercy, as it regards his imagination, of the ideas oftenest presented to him, and can hardly escape contamination from a frequent exhibition of such as are unseemly and improper.

For these reasons, a man of thought, although he would forfeit the character of a philosopher, and deserve the pity if not the contempt of every inquirer after truth, by evincing the slightest fear of any arguments, by avoiding any book, lest it should produce a change in his opinions, would be perfectly justified in shunning such company or such writings as have a tendency to pervert the imagination. In the one case he can receive no impression which he can have any proper reason for avoiding; in the other he is exposed to disgusting or degrading images, which, when they have once become familiar, may intrude amidst the purest and most serious meditations.

NOTE C (page 83.)

I have left the foot-note to the text in this page exactly as it appeared in the first edition; but it by no means solves the whole of the question, why we are apt to take greater offence at an endeavour to subvert

part of our creed, than at an attempt to enlarge it by further additions. It must be partly accounted for by the fact, that our affections attach themselves to a doctrine as well as to any external object. If early and deeply fixed, a multitude of interesting associations naturally gather round it; it becomes endeared to us by being connected with pleasurable circumstances, the rallying point of pleasant thoughts. We are alarmed and indignant, therefore, at any design to shake its validity: the removal of it from our minds would be the destruction of a whole system of associations, and perhaps active habits, of which it is the nucleus or centre; the bare suggestion of its being erroneous infuses all the inquietude of doubt, and obstructs the course of our habitual thoughts and feelings, and our first impulse is to resent the attack. But it is obvious that a new article of faith, which suffers our old opinions to remain, and merely offers something additional to our thoughts, produces none of these effects. It overturns no superstructure of association; it interposes no chasm in the regular tract of our imagination, no sudden hiatus in the circle of our feelings, no doubts to impede our intellectual movements. It occasions therefore no alarm, and no resentment, no laceration of mind (to borrow an expression of Dr. Johnson's), while it inspires that self-complacency attendant on a perception of the superiority of our own views.

In the Essay on the Influence of Reason on the Feelings, we have shown how liable the mind is, in certain circumstances, to the recurrence of these feelings, even in opposition to the convictions of the un-

derstanding. It seems to have been a similar view of the subject, arising probably from his own consciousness and experience (for we all know how tenaciously his early prejudices clung to his mind), which led Dr. Johnson to maintain, in the passage which supplied the expression just quoted, that no reliance could be placed on a conversion from the Roman Catholic to the Protestant faith.

"A man," he observes, "who is converted from Protestantism to Popery, may be sincere: he parts with nothing: he is only superadding to what he already had. But a convert from Popery to Protestantism gives up so much of what he has held as sacred as any thing that he retains, there is so much *laceration of mind* in such a conversion, that it can hardly be sincere and lasting."

We may trace to the same source, namely, to the pleasurable ideas and emotions which gather round a doctrine, those frequent declamations which we hear against cold reasoning and hard-hearted logic, and pathetic appeals to one part of our nature against the other. An original thinker, a reformer in moral science, will thus often appear a hard and insensible character. He goes beyond the feelings and associations of the age; he leaves them behind him; he shocks our old prejudices: it is reserved for a subsequent generation, to whom his views have been unfolded from their infancy, and in whose minds all the interesting associations have collected round them, which formerly encircled the exploded opinions, to regard his discoveries with unmingled pleasure. Hence an author, who aspires after popularity, must not project

his powers in advance of the age; but throw them back amongst the recollections and associations of past times.

NOTE D (page 88.)

Many good men, who have wished to be liberal to such as differed from them in opinion, have perplexed themselves as to the extent to which their liberality should be carried. Some, with the inconclusiveness of conscientious feeling, combined with feeble powers of logical deduction, have sagely inferred that it ought not to be carried too far, while others, in the true spirit of persecution, have denounced any indulgence to important differences as spurious liberality.

The principles unfolded in the present work relieve us from all difficulty on this point. True liberality consists in not imputing to others any moral turpitude, because their opinions differ from our own. It does not consist in ostensibly yielding to the opinions of others, in refraining from a rigorous examination of their soundness, or from detecting and exposing the fallacies which they involve; but in regarding those who hold them as free from consequent culpability, and abstaining from casting upon them that moral odium, with which men have been ready in all ages to overwhelm such as deviated in the least from the miserable compound of truth and error, which they hugged to their own bosoms.

NOTE E (page 102.)

It is not often that we can meet with any direct arguments against the utility of truth—at least in a

quarter which entitles them to attention. The following passage, therefore, from the Edinburgh Review may be considered of some value, as a specimen of what can be alleged against the doctrine. It shows the feebleness of acknowledged talent when engaged on the side of sophistry.

The extract is from a Review of Belsham's Elements of the Philosophy of the Mind.

"Mr. Belsham has one short argument, that whatever is true cannot be hurtful. It is the motto of his title page, and is afterwards repeated with equal emphasis, at every time of need. 'If the doctrine be true,' he contends, 'the diffusion of it can do no harm. It is an established and undeniable principle, that truth must be favorable to virtue.' To us, however, this principle, instead of being undeniable, has always appeared the most questionable of postulates. In the declamation of Plato, or the poetry of Akenside, we admit it with little scruple, because we do not read Plato or Akenside for the truths they may chance to contain; but we always feel more than scepticism, when we are assailed by it in a treatise of pure philosophy: nor can we account for an almost universal assent it has received, from any other circumstance than the profession and habits of the first teachers of morals in our schools, and of the greater number of their successors. It was a maxim of religion, before it became a maxim of philosophy; though, even as a religious maxim, it formed a very inconsistent part of the optimism in which it was combined. The Deity wills happiness; he loves truth: truth therefore must be productive of good. Such is the reasoning of the

optimist. But he forgets, that, in his system, error too must have been *beneficial*, because error *has been*; and that the employment of falsehood for the production of good cannot be more unworthy of the Divine Being, than the acknowledged employment of rapine and murder for the same purpose. There is, therefore, nothing in the abstract consideration of truth and Deity, which justifies the adoption of such a maxim; and as little is it justified by our practical experience. In the small events of that familiar and hourly intercourse, which forms almost the whole of human life, how much is happiness increased by the general adoption of a system of concerted and limited deceit! for it is either in that actual falsehood which must, as falsehood, be productive of evil, or in the suppression of that truth, which, as truth, must have been productive of good, that the chief happiness of civilized *manners* consists; and he from whose doctrine it flows, that we are to be in no case hypocrites, would, in mere manners, reduce us to a degree of barbarism beyond that of the rudest savage, who, in the simple hospitalities of his hut, or the ceremonial of the public assemblies of his tribe, has still some courtesies, which he fulfils with all the exactness of polite dissimulation. In the greater events of life, how often might the advantage of erroneous belief be felt! If, for example, it were a superstition of every mind, that the murderer, immediately on the perpetration of his guilt, must himself expire by sympathy, a new motive would be added to the side of virtue; and the only circumstance to be regretted would be, not that the falsehood would produce effect, since that effect would be only

serviceable, but that perhaps the good effect would not be of long duration, as it would be destroyed for ever by the rashness of the first daring experimenter. The visitation of the murderer by the nightly ghost, which exists in the superstition of so many countries, and which forms a great part of that complex and unanalysed horror with which the crime continues to be considered after the belief of the superstition itself has ceased, has probably been of more service to mankind than the truths of all the sermons, that have been preached on the corresponding prohibition in the Decalogue. It is unfortunate, that with this beneficial awe unnecessary horrors have been connected; for the *place* continues to be haunted, as well as the *person;* and the dread of our infancy is thus directed, rather to the supernatural appearance than to the crime. But if superstition could exist, and be modified, at the will of an enlightened legislator, so as to be deprived of its terrors to the innocent, and turned wholly against the guilty, we know no principle of our nature on which it would be so much for the interest of mankind to operate. It would be a species of prohibitive religion, more impressive, at the moment of beginning crime, than religion itself; because its penalties would be more conceivable and immediate. Innumerable cases may be imagined, in which other errors of belief would be of moral advantage; and we may therefore assume, as *established and undeniable*, that there is nothing in the nature of truth which makes it *necessarily* good; that in the greater number of instances, truth is beneficial; but that, of the whole number of truths and falsehoods a certain number are productive of good, and others of

evil. To which number any particular truth or falsehood belongs, must be shown, in the usual way, by reasonings of direct experience or analogy; and hence, *in a question of utility*, the demonstration of mere logical truth cannot justly be adduced as superseding the necessity of other inquiries. Even though the contrary of that postulate, which Mr. Belsham has assumed, could not have been shown from *other* cases, it would not *therefore* have been applicable, without proof, to the great questions which he discusses; for these questions comprehend all the truths that are of most importance in human life, which are thus the very truths from which the justness of the assumed principle is most fully to be demonstrated or denied."

It may be remarked in the first place, that this argument begins by confounding two essentially different things, the veracity of men and the knowledge of truth. The advantages of a system of conventional simulation and dissimulation we may pass over with the remark, that if it is really beneficial to society, it is so exactly in proportion as its character is accurately appreciated by those engaged in it. Where it is perfectly well understood, as it generally is, it does the least harm, and produces the most benefit. If any individual is deceived by it, if he misconstrues the current professions of social intercourse in their literal sense, he usually suffers for his error, which proves, that, even in this case, a knowledge of the truth is a necessary protection against evil.

Dismissing, however, the consideration of veracity, let us proceed to the real question, whether truth is beneficial, and examine the arguments adduced in support of the negative.

The writer of the passage appears from first to last to proceed on the principle, that the true consequences of evil actions are not the most efficacious motives to deter men from committing those actions, but that it is useful for them to apprehend other and more alarming results, consequences of greater magnitude, capable of producing more vivid impressions on the imagination; that since mankind do not always act from a conviction of what is best, but from the predominant appetite or passion of the moment, it is expedient to call in the aid of some counter passion, founded on false views, whose influence shall operate in the direction which the most enlightened judgment would point out. The first thing, which strikes the mind in this view of the matter, is the needlessness of any extraneous motives, in cases which have an abundant supply within themselves. If human actions are morally bad only in proportion as they are pernicious to society, and to the agent himself, a perfect knowledge of their consequences seems to be all that is requisite to deter him from them; and to excite a dread of something more terrible would be a superfluous and wanton pressure on the feelings. We may admit, nevertheless, for our present purpose, that any groundless fears, which served to corroborate the effect of just apprehensions would be so far useful; but whether they were absolutely beneficial would obviously depend on their not being necessarily accompanied by circumstances of an opposite character and of greater moment. That they would be inevitably attended by circumstances of this latter description, both in the instances supposed by the writer before us, and in

every consistently imaginable instance, I shall endeavour to show as succinctly as the subject permits.

An apprehension of false consequences must evidently be founded on an incorrect knowledge of facts, or on wrong inferences from facts accurately ascertained. In either case the existence of the error implies a state of ignorance, and, if it regards actions important to mankind, ignorance of a deep and dangerous character.

Let us take, for instance, the first case imagined by the critic: let us suppose the universal prevalence of the belief, that a murderer would expire by sympathy immediately on the commission of the crime. The mass of moral and physical ignorance and misconception which must exist to support a belief of this nature in any society, cannot fail to rise before the understanding of every one who reflects a moment on the subject. It is not to be supposed that mankind could be involved in so gross an error, while they were in other respects at all enlightened. On the contrary, its prevalence would imply a total ignorance of the laws of animal life, of the phenomena of the human mind, of the rules of evidence, and the principles of reasoning, a blindness in the human race to every thing within and without them. These would be necessary conditions for the bare existence of so absurd a doctrine; they would be essential to its support, and would give birth to a multitude of evils infinitely greater than any which it would prevent. Although no clandestine assassinations might be committed, a thousand public butcheries would probably take place, executions for witchcraft, human sacrifices, self-immolations,

legal murders for heresy and dissent. The mischief would be without assignable limits. Laws restrictive of innocent or beneficial actions, gloomy superstitions, absurd customs, fanatical rites, wars of vengeance, slavery scarcely conscious of its own baseness, some or all of these would be the inevitable accompaniments, sooner or later, of such an erroneous belief. Even supposing the delusion to exist amongst a gentle and harmless race, who were free from the grossest of the evils here enumerated, such a state of society could never be secure from them. There is no barrier against the irruption of the evils of ignorance but true knowledge. Hence the peaceable, the almost happy condition in which uncivilized nations may occasionally be found, is a state of fragile tranquillity, liable to be crushed from without or shattered from within, by those spontaneous ebullitions of caprice and enthusiasm, against which the human mind has no security but in the full light of science and reason. What principles, amidst such ignorance, could prove a defence against any absurdity which a man of cunning and audacity might find his advantage in maintaining! At the mercy of impostors and fanatics, or of that mongrel race which partakes of the complexion of both,* such a society would be in continual danger of an intestine ferment, which (if I may borrow an image from an exploded doctrine) might at any time burst out into the equivocal generation of vice and misery.

This writer must have had strange views of the nature of the human mind, and have made little use of

* "Fingunt, simul creduntque."—TACITUS.

the lessons to be gathered from the history of the race, to suppose, what is necessarily implied in his argument, that a gross error could exist independent and insulated, deprived of all its pernicious relations and accompaniments, stripped of its power in every way, except in that particular direction which he has chosen to imagine.

He seems to have fallen into the common practice of looking only at a single direct and immediate consequence of the error, unconscious of the necessity of expanding his view over the whole circle of its influence and connections. A single appeal to our own consciousness, a single glance at our fellow-men, suffices to show that one doctrine is necessarily connected with other doctrines; that when one truth is established, other dependant truths spring up around it; that for any given error to prevail, a number of other errors must prevail at the same time. This is the reason universally applicable why error, taking in the whole of its concomitants and consequences, never can be beneficial. It never can have a preponderance of good effects, because its existence implies related, collateral, co-ordinate errors, and is incompatible with that completeness of knowledge and perfection of reason, which are indispensable to the highest degree of human happiness.

The other hypothetical case adduced is exposed to the same arguments. Assuming that a belief in apparitions really operates to prevent murders, we have on the one hand a good attained, and on the other we have, as in the former case, all the error and ignorance which such a belief implies, with their incalculable train of pernicious consequences, which it is unneces-

sary to recapitulate. The argument is already abundantly conclusive. If a false apprehension of consequences in these important cases would be accompanied by the evils which we have endeavoured to show would be inseparable from it, the assistance which it might furnish in deterring from crime would be a subordinate consideration. But it is by no means evident that it would lend any assistance worth regarding. The whole good accomplished is not to be placed to the account of the error; it is only the superiority of its efficacy in deterring from the crime, over the salutary influence of those other circumstances which would operate in the same direction, if such a belief did not exist. The natural horror at taking the life of a fellow creature, the infamy of detection, the vengeance of society, and the other necessary or probable consequences of the deed, would still be left to produce their effect: and it would be difficult to show, that the addition of an absurd belief would materially enhance the motives to abstain from this consummation of wickedness. It may be even questioned whether the power of the motives would not be impaired, when it is considered that such a belief would be incompatible with that clear view of all the real consequences of the crime which an enlightened mind can alone fully possess, and which, except under the despotism of some passion that puts all consequences out of sight, would be sufficient to save any individual from a deed so irreparably destructive of his own happiness. We must recollect too, that it is one of the beneficial effects of a clear and correct view of the consequences of actions to dispossess passion of this power, and that

the tempest which obscures the intellectual vision is most likely to arise, and produce its melancholy results in a mind already clouded by error and ignorance.

To all these considerations it may be added, that a morality founded on the exhibition of false consequences to the imagination is insecure and unstable. The delusion is constantly open to suspicion and exposure. The imputed consequences are often obscurely felt, if not clearly seen, to be fictitious, and a degree of practical scepticism is induced, which destroys their influence on the conduct without replacing it by motives of a higher, because of a more rational character.

On the whole, the philosophy of the critic reminds one strongly of the profound policy of those mothers, who raise up dark and dismal images of dustmen, beggars, chimney-sweeps, and other nursery bugbears, to enforce their authority over unmanageable children; nor is the one entitled to less credit and clemency than the other. To the principles of the philosopher and the conduct of the parent an equal tribute of admiration is due, and the errors which the former commends in theory are just as well adapted to raise mankind to the dignity and happiness of rational beings, as those which the latter reduces into practice.

After this general view of the subject, which is sufficient to expose the futility of these and all similar objections to the doctrine which teaches the necessary perniciousness of error, it is scarcely perhaps worth while to descend to a minuter scrutiny of the logical blunder committed by the critic in his elaborate eulogium on the hypothetical utility of spectres. I have regarded

rather the general scope of his reasoning, than the form into which he has put it. Yet, it is too curious an instance of the slips of sophistry to be entirely passed over. "If," says he, "superstition could exist, and be modified, at the will of an enlightened legislator, so as to be deprived of its terrors to the innocent, and turned wholly against the guilty, we know no principle of our nature, on which it would be so much for the interest of mankind to operate." He then proceeds to draw the conclusion, that therefore error is not necessarily injurious, "that there is nothing in the nature of truth which makes it necessarily good." This is surely one of the strangest pieces of reasoning ever hazarded. Had the critic alleged, that superstition *could* be modified at the will of an enlightened legislator, and rendered serviceable to mankind, then, however the proposition might be disputed, there would have been some coherence of argument in proceeding to say, that therefore it is not necessarily hurtful, but to say that *if* it could be so modified it would be highly beneficial, and that therefore it is not necessarily injurious, is a perfect instance of inconsequential reasoning. From merely conditional or hypothetical premises, he has drawn a positive and absolute conclusion. It is as if any one should contend, that arsenic is not necessarily poisonous: because, if it could be received into the stomach without injury it would not be destructive of life. In a word, the writer does not say, that if A were equal to B and B equal to C, then A and C would be equal; but in utter defiance of rules of logic and forms of reasoning, if A were equal to B and B to C, therefore A and C are equal.

He has, it is true, interposed another sentence between the premises and the conclusion, which we have here brought together, and it may perhaps be imagined, that the inference deduced was meant to be drawn from this intermediate proposition. To suppose this, however, would be to presume that the author had taken the trouble of inventing instances, and had then dismissed them without applying them to the purpose for which he had tasked his invention. If this indeed were true, if the sentence in question, namely, "innumerable cases may be imagined in which other errors of belief may be of moral advantage," were to be considered as the proposition on which the conclusion depends, the formal logical absurdity would certainly be got quit of, but only to be replaced by a substantial error equally glaring. The argument would then amount to this, that if we can imagine a thing to exist without its essential properties, it is a proof that they are not essential; a principle which carries its own refutation along with it. We have already seen what, in the case of error, these essential properties are. It was the province of the critic to show, either by reasoning from admitted principles or by the induction of facts, that properties of this kind are not necessarily connected with it, and not to content himself with asserting that they might be separated in imagination. Error may certainly be imagined in one sense to prevail without attendant evil, just as lead may be conceived to float in water; but what should we say to the natural philosopher, who contended that the metal is not necessarily the heavier substance, because we may imagine it to possess buoyancy when placed in the liquid?

Perhaps more than enough has been said in reply to this vindication of error, but the principle involved so well deserves a complete elucidation, that the prolixity of the present note will be excused. From the internal evidence afforded by the style and matter of the article in the Edinburgh Review, from which the passage here commented on is extracted, one would suspect it to have proceeded from the pen of the late Dr. Thomas Brown. If so, he lived to outgrow such philosophy, for passages of an opposite tendency might easily be quoted from his subsequent writings. Here, it is evident he was only trying his wings, and he seems to have been more ambitious to display the brilliancy of the plumage than to prove the strength of the pinions; more intent on showing the grace and agility of his evolutions than the boldness and precision of his flight.

NOTE F (page 125.)

It is an interesting inquiry, what are those circumstances which form the best external criterion of the truth of a doctrine, or under which there is the greatest probability of its being true?

In answer to this question, I think it may be said, that we have the best test of the truth of any doctrine, the greatest possible assurance which external circumstances can give, when it is universally believed amidst the fullest liberty of scrutinizing its pretensions. If both these circumstances do not concur, the doctrine may be pronounced doubtful. The universal belief of a doctrine is no argument for its truth, if dissent, and controversy are prohibited. And on the other hand,

if a doctrine is believed by only a part of those who have examined it, although the fullest freedom of inquiry prevails, it may be considered as not grounded on satisfactory evidence; or at least that the evidence in favour of it has not been hitherto exhibited in all its force. If this is true, it necessarily follows, that to protect a doctrine from examination, is to exclude that combination of circumstances which constitutes the best external evidence, and gives us the greatest possible assurance of its validity.

NOTE G (page 126.)

A very apposite confirmation of this remark may be found in the following letter from Dr. Reid to Dr. Gregory: "It would be want of candour not to own, that I think there is some merit in what you are pleased to call *my philosophy;* but I think it lies chiefly in having called in question the common theory of *ideas*, or *images of things in the mind*, being the only objects of thought; a theory founded on natural prejudices, and so universally received as to be interwoven with the structure of language. Yet were I to give you a detail of what led me to call in question this theory, after I had long held it as self-evident and unquestionable, you would think, as I do, that there was much of chance in the matter. The discovery was the birth of time, not of genius; and BERKELEY and HUME did more to bring it to light than the man that hit upon it. I think there is hardly any thing that can be called *mine* in the philosophy of the mind, which does not follow with ease from the detection of this prejudice.

"I must, therefore, beg of you most earnestly to make no contrast in my favour to the disparagement of my predecessors in the same pursuit. I can truly say of them, and shall always avow, what you are pleased to say of me, that but for the assistance I have received from their writings I never could have wrote or thought what I have done."—*Life of Dr Reid by Dugald Stewart*, page 122.

NOTE H (page 130.)

It may perhaps be argued, that although a man might be presumptuous in maintaining that he himself was infallible in his opinions, or in setting up his own belief as a criterion of truth, yet he may without such presumption, nay, even with great modesty and diffidence in his own faculties, repose implicit confidence in the infallibility of another, and act upon it accordingly. But on strict examination it will be found, that he who acts on the infallibility of another, proceeds also on the assumption of his own infallibility; for the conclusion that the other party is infallible is necessarily the judgment of his own understanding, and it is therefore, at the bottom, on the judgment of his own understanding that he acts.

Whether we assert a doctrine to be true from our own views of it, or whether we assert the opinions of others, concerning it to be correct, we are equally laying down a judgment of our own; a judgment, in the one case directly on a doctrine, in the other case on the correctness of other people's views, but in both cases equally a conclusion of our own minds: and if

we at any time act on the assumption, that such a conclusion cannot possibly be wrong, we take for granted our own infallibility.

A similar position, namely, that whoever maintains the infallibility of another person, does in reality maintain the same of himself, is thus illustrated in a letter from the eccentric author of Sandford and Merton.

"I cannot help," says he, "digressing here to propose a curious argument, derived from this principle, against the church of Rome; which I do not remember to have seen. He that asserts the infallibility of another, must also assert his own; otherwise he may be deceived in the judgment he makes of that infallibility, as well as in any other judgment. But if he allow that all his own judgments are fallible, and may be erroneous, then his particular opinion of the infallibility may be erroneous too, unless he can show a particular reason for the exception. In this manner it may be shown, that the real confidence every man has in his own judgment is much the same, since it must always precede his having a confidence in any one else."*

Thus no one can escape from the necessity of ultimately relying and acting on his own judgment. Even in the case of that apparently utter prostration of mind, in which a man regards a fellow-creature, or a number of fellow-creatures, as above the reach of error, it is still the same. Such a state of mind implies a greater degree of rashness and presumption than is generally imagined; for what an extensive compre-

* Letter from Mr. Day, in Memoirs of R. L. Edgeworth, vol. ii. page 89.

hension of human nature, and the affairs of the world, and the relations of man to all around him, would be necessary before even the grounds of such an opinion could be brought together?

NOTE I (page 148.)

It must be observed, that we are here treating the matter as a question of policy, not of morality, that is, we are inquiring whether it is expedient to allow an unlimited freedom of publication, not under what circumstances men are justified in availing themselves of that liberty. On the latter point, however, we may be here permitted to offer two remarks.

1. It is a consequence of the principles in the text, that he who publishes his opinions, however erroneous they may ultimately prove to be, is conferring, as far as it is in his power, a benefit on society, provided he communicates them in a proper manner. There is as much merit in the publication of an opinion which is false, as in that of an opinion which is true, other circumstances being the same, and the publisher in each instance having the same conviction that he is promulgating truth.

2. It is also a remark of some importance, that in the expression and publication of opinions, the opinions themselves are not the only things manifested. Various moral as well as intellectual qualities are displayed. Truth itself may be urged in rude and indecorous language, with base and malevolent feelings. Such manifestations of bad passions are of course worthy of moral reprehension, in whatever cause they are em-

ployed. Whether they appear in connection with true or false doctrines, is a circumstance perfectly immaterial, and which can neither extenuate nor aggravate their culpability. The morality of the press is a subject worthy of some able pen. The public sentiment wants rousing and directing against a variety of acts, which although viewed with apathy when committed through the medium of the press, would not be a moment tolerated in private society.

NOTE K (page 157.)

The principles developed and established in the two preceding essays form the proper basis of that liberty, which has passed under the several names of toleration, religious liberty, and liberty of conscience; the liberty of worshipping God in the way which approves itself to the judgment of each individual, without incurring any pain, loss, or disability.

The grounds for interfering with this liberty may be supposed of several kinds: first, to protect the honour of God; secondly, to punish erroneous opinions; thirdly, to prevent those opinions from spreading.

The first object is evidently not proper for human interference. The very supposition of our ability to accomplish it, involves a similar error to that of the anthropomorphites, a reduction of the Deity to the nature and constitution of man. But if it were a proper object, who shall judge between two individuals, or two sects, which has adopted the form of worship, and the doctrines most agreeable to the dignity of the Eternal Being? Or again, if one body of men could infallibly know that they were in the

right, how could they possibly do honour to God, or protect him from dishonour, by forcing upon their fellow creatures a form and manner of worship which they could not conscientiously adopt, or even by suppressing creeds and observances of an erroneous nature? To attempt the former would be proceeding on one of the most monstrous suppositions, which ever entered into the human imagination, that the Supreme Being could be pleased with hypocrisy and insincerity; nor would it be much more rational to endeavour to effect the latter. If a man entertains any doctrine derogatory to the character of the Deity, the only way to remove it from his creed is to address ourselves to his understanding. To forbid the expression of that doctrine, as it cannot extirpate it from the mind, is doing God no honour, for in what possible way can the expression of a thought derogatory to his character, dishonour him more than the thought itself? In every view, then, the object of protecting the honour of the Deity should have no place in human regulations. It is far beyond their reach, and ought to be sacred from their presumption.

With regard to the second object, the punishment of erroneous opinions, its absurdity has been sufficiently exposed. It would be the punishment of innocence for no possible good. The only object of restrictions on the liberty of worship, that can be maintained with a show of reason, is the third. This liberty can come under the cognizance of the legislator only as a mode of propagating opinions. The manner in which a man worships God, provided it involves no breach of moral duty, cannot affect the community in any other way;

and all the arguments which have been adduced, in favor of perfect freedom of public discussion, are of equal force in favour of perfect freedom of worship. But there are some peculiar evils attending restrictions on the latter. A person may entertain an opinion, and yet not feel under any conscientious obligation to express it; but he who thinks a certain form of worship right, feels an obligation to adopt it. Restraint, therefore, even were it submitted to, would produce much secret misery. But in general it would not be submitted to. In the mind of such a one, there would be what he considered as his duty to God opposed to his duty to men, and he must of course prefer the former, or be degraded in his moral feelings. Either way the community must suffer: it must be either disturbed by the resistance of some of its members to the authority of the state, and the consequent excitation of a thousand malignant passions, or injured by destroying their moral integrity, by hardening the conscience and debasing the character.

And what, after all, would be attained by these imbecile restrictions? The only thing which they could accomplish, if they were attended by perfect success, would be uniformity of worship and profession. But this might be either a good or an evil. A uniformity in religious observances, forms, and doctrines, which were in all respects true and proper, and in the adoption and profession of which every individual was sincere, would be a good; but a uniformity in those which were not in all respects true and proper, and in the adoption and profession of which many of the community would be acting a feigned part, is the only

uniformity which restraints could secure, and that would be an evil. It would be far better to have a variety than a sameness of error, because there would be a better prospect of attaining truth by the collision of opinions; and that it would be infinitely preferable to have a variety of professions according to actual belief, than a uniformity of professions not sincere, it would be an insult to any mind of common moral feeling to attempt to prove.

The true grounds, the grand principles of toleration, or (to avoid a term which men ought never to have been under the necessity of employing) of religious liberty and liberty of conscience, are thus the principles which it was the object of the two preceding essays to establish—that opinions are involuntary, and involve no merit or demerit, and that the free publication of opinions is beneficial to society, because it is the means of arriving at truth. They are both founded on the unalterable nature of the human mind, and are sure, sooner or later, to be universally recognized and applied.

Under the general prevalence of these truths, society would soon present a different aspect. Every species of intolerance would vanish; because, how much soever it might be the interest of men to suppress opinions contrary to their own, there would be no longer any pretext for compulsion or oppression. Difference of sentiment would no longer engender the same degree of passion and ill-will. The irritation, virulence, and invective of controversy would be in a great measure sobered down into cool argumentation. The intercourse of private life would cease to be em-

bittered by the odium of heterodoxy, and all the benevolent affections would have more room for expansion. Men would discover, that although their neighbours differed in opinion from themselves, they might possess equal moral worth, and equal claims to affection and esteem.

A difference in civil privileges, that eternal source of discontent and disorder, that canker in the happiness of society, which can be cured only by being exterminated, would be swept away, and in a few years a wonder would arise that rational beings could have been inveigled into its support.

Another important consequence would be, a more general union of mankind in the pursuit of truth. Since errors would no longer be regarded as involving moral turpitude, every effort to obtain the grand object in view, however unsuccessful, would be received with indulgence, if not applause. There would be more exertion, because there would be more encouragement. If moral science has already gradually advanced, shackled as it has been by inveterate prejudices, what would be the rapidity of its march under a system, which, far from opposing obstacles, presented facilities to its progress?

Note L (p. 180).

The following is a singularly apposite illustration of the remarks in the text.

"The Emperors of China, her statesmen, her merchants, her people, and her *Philosophers* also, are all idolaters. For, though many of the learned affect to

despise the popular superstitions, and to deride all worship, except that paid to the great and visible objects of nature, heaven and the earth; yet their own system is incapable of raising them above that which they affect to contemn; and at the hour of death, finding that some god is necessary, and not knowing the true God, they send for the priests of false gods, to pray for their restoration to health, and for the rest of their spirits after dissolution, and a happy return to the world again. It is remarkable, that the *Yu-Keaou*, or sect of the learned, though in health they laugh at the fooleries of the more idolatrous sects; yet generally in sickness, in the prospect of death, and at funerals, employ the HO-CHANG and TAOU-SZE, to offer masses; recite the king (standard books, of a religious and moral kind thus denominated); write charms; ring bells; chaunt prayers; and entreat the gods. Admitting the influence which universal custom has over them in these things, we may perhaps also conclude, that they feel their own system uncomfortable to die with. In that awful hour, when 'heart and flesh fail,' human beings generally feel the necessity of resorting to some system, either true or false, which professes to afford any hope of escaping or mitigating those evils, which a consciousness of sin compels them to fear, and of attaining that happiness, the desire of which is identified with our nature."—A Retrospect of the First Ten Years of the Protestant Mission to China, by William Milne, p. 29--31.

THE END.

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